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A LITTLE WORLD.

BY

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"*BY BIRTH A LADY*," "*THE SAPPHIRE CROSS*," "*MIDNIGHT WEBS*,"

ETC. ETC.

VOL. III.




HENRY S. KING & Co., LONDON.

1877.

251. d. 779

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A LITTLE WORLD.



CHAPTER I.

DISAPPOINTMENT.

FIVE minutes after, his brain in a whirl from the reaction that had taken place, when—wound up to expect some great horror—he had found nothing but that which was trifling and absurd, Sir Francis Redgrave was seated in the Frenchman's room ; for he had turned sick and faint, and brandy had been procured for him, Patty eagerly bringing forward glass and water, for Janet seemed completely unnerved, and had sunk down on a low seat with her face in her hands, as if stunned.

“You look young, and good, and pure-minded,” said the old man, feebly, as he looked fixedly in Patty's fair young face, as she gazed sympathisingly in his countenance.

"Listen to me, my child—for you are quite a child to me. Perhaps you know I am seeking my boy, my only child. I can see through it now. In his folly he was attracted here by you. I don't reproach you; I say nothing harsh, only pray you humbly, as his father, to tell me where they have placed him. Is he dead? Has he been inveigled into some den for the sake of his money? Only tell me—only let me be at peace, and I will bless you. Do you know? Do not be afraid to answer. You shall be protected, even if it were for life, should it prove necessary. The man below has sworn that my son entered this house, and did not come out again."

"Yes—Jack Screwby," said the sergeant, interposing, and nodding his head as he spoke.

"Tell me then, my child," continued Sir Francis, "and I will bless you, pray for you, offer up an old man's prayers for your happiness—only set me free from this horrible suspense. Tell me even if he is dead."

Patty sobbed as she gazed in the old man's face, and then with an effort she exclaimed—"It's all false, every word. That man is a

bad, cruel fellow, and the enemy of my friends here. What he has said is not true, I am certain of it."

"You are in league with these people," said the old man, turning from her.

"No—no—no! What I said is true—quite true," sobbed Patty.

But the old man refused to hear her, and turned to speak to Janet; but she shrank from him, cowering in a corner with a child-like display of fear, and only glancing at him from time to time, as if horror-stricken.

"You see," said Sir Francis, "she knows all, and dare not approach to tell it. That there is some fearful mystery here, I feel more and more convinced; but, doubtless, in God's good time all will be brought to light."

He rose as he spoke, and approached Janet, who shrank from him more and more, waving her hand to keep him off her, and each moment growing more frightened and hysterical.

"Come, my friends," said Sir Francis, drawing back with a bitter sigh, as he saw the uselessness of pressing inquiry in Janet's case, "let us go. Constable, you will sift this matter to the very bottom."

The sergeant nodded shortly, and Sir Francis turned towards the door ; but Patty flew to him, and caught one of his hands.

"Oh, sir !" she cried, "can you not believe me ? Indeed, indeed, I have spoken the truth. Your son did come many times, I know ; but I hate him," she cried, naïvely. "I would not, though, nor would any one here, hurt a hair of his head. We could not help his coming ; and if he were here on that Tuesday night, I did not see him when I came. I am sorry—indeed I am ; and I pity you from the bottom of my heart, for we have our feelings even as you rich people have."

"But not feeling enough to ease a poor old man's heart," said Sir Francis, coldly, as thrusting her back, he took another step towards the door.

"He does not believe me—he does not believe me !" sobbed Patty, clasping her hands together, and then, excitedly, she exclaimed—"Does no one believe what I say ?"

"I do, Miss Pellet, from my soul," exclaimed a deep voice, and, stepping forward, Harry Clayton caught her clasped hands in his, as the young girl joyfully met his gaze.

But this was but for a moment ; the next instant had hardly passed before her eyes fell, she hastily drew back her hands, and, with a heavy sigh, she shrank back to where Janet cowered in her chair, and stayed there until, one by one, the others went out, leaving the two friends the sole occupants of the room.

"Are they all gone?" whispered Janet at last, from where she had hidden her face in Patty's breast.

"Yes; all—all," said the agitated girl.

"I could not bear to look at the suffering old man," said Janet, huskily. "It seemed to me as if he would be able to read in my face all that I felt, and so I acted like a frightened child, and he must have looked upon me as almost an idiot. But it is very horrible, Patty; and I seem to see the poor boy always before my eyes, with his white forehead all dabbled in blood, and his face pale and ghostlike. I dream of him so every night, and I know I feel as if something dreadful had happened. But what does it all mean?"

"Oh, hush—oh, hush!" said Patty; while Mrs Winks, who had just returned, buried

her face in her apron, and seating herself upon the floor, as more lowly than a chair, she rocked herself to and fro, in the true sympathy she felt for the distressed girls.

“Why did they come here at all?” cried Janet, fiercely. “We were happy in our poor way before that; and now they have made us wretched for life. But Patty, Patty, this sight—this horrid vision—which I always have before me;” and as she spoke, she looked straight before her with hot and straining eyes. “What does it mean? I feel sometimes that I cannot bear it.”

Patty tried hard to soothe her companion; but her efforts seemed to be absolutely in vain, so wild and excited had Janet grown. At times her hearers shuddered as they listened to her exclamations, Mrs Winks even going so far as to glance over her shoulder to make sure that nothing of the kind described was really present.

Then for a time the poor girl calmed down, and Patty began to hope that her soothing words had taken effect; but soon there came a repetition, and Janet raised her head to stare straight before her, as she exclaimed:—

"It seems, at times, as if I could not bear it—as if it would send me mad ; for he is in pain, I know—I feel. He is wounded—perhaps dead ; and oh, Patty," she whispered, her face, her voice softening as she leaned her forehead upon her companion's shoulder, "I love him so—so dearly."

Kissing her tenderly, smoothing her hair fondly the while, Patty tried to whisper comfort to the fluttering aching heart, beating so wildly within that deformed breast.

But all seemed in vain ; the troubled spirit refused to be comforted, for it knew its desolation, and that even if Lionel Redgrave were found to be living and well, there was no hope, no rest for her.

"Try not to cry so much, dear," said Patty, simply. "It will make your head ache."

"Better the head than the heart, Patty," cried Janet, passionately. "Oh, I wish I was dead—I wish I was dead!"

"Hush, hush, dear ! how can you ?" whispered Patty. "Try, do try to keep it back."

"Yes, yes," said Janet, with a sigh that was more like a groan. "I will be patient. I will try and bear it, and you will try and

pray with me, Patty, that he may be safe and well, and restored to the good old man, his father. Oh! how I longed to be near him—to go on my knees by his side; and when he asked me to come, it was almost more than I could bear. Something seemed to be drawing me to him, and again something was dragging me back. Patty, how do people feel when they go mad? Is it anything like what I have been suffering these last few days?”

“Did you not promise me that you would be calm?” whispered Patty, soothingly.

“Yes, yes, I know I did, and I am trying; but you will pray too, Patty dear, will you not?”

“Yes,” answered Patty, as she clung close to the poor suffering girl. “I will pray too.”

“But *he* believed you, Patty,” Janet exclaimed, suddenly; “and came to your side then, like a lover should. I was in trouble, but all the same I could see his proud look. He loves you—he loves you!”

“Oh! hush, Janet, hush!” cried Patty, wearily. “Am I not unhappy enough? It can never—never be! And besides,” she added, proudly, as her pale cheeks flamed up, “does he not love somebody else?”

"Here's somebody a-comin'," cried Mrs Winks, suddenly starting into life from the bundle of collapsed clothes that seemed to be heaped the minute before upon the floor. "Most likely it's Mr Pellet come to fetch you, my dear; and oh! what faces we three have got!—all swelled up with cryin' so as was never seen. What's goin' to come of us all? for, dear me, if it ain't for all the world like a scene in a play, with the lovers all going crosswise and the others crooked; and I declare once if I didn't think as the curtain was going to come down in a minute, and I should have to fetch my basket. But there! do wipe your eyes, my dears—there's somebody a-comin'; and it's glad I shall be when it comes to the last act, and everybody's made happy ever after—except Jack Screwby, as is the bad villin of the whole piece. Come, dry your eyes, do."

Mrs Winks gave her own optics a most tremendous scrub with her apron as she spoke, drying them certainly, but at the same time making them far more red. Then she made an elephantine kind of movement towards the door, holding it to with one

hand, signalling with the other to her young companions to remove the remaining traces of tears, and nodding and frowning till there was a gentle tap, and a voice said from the outside—

“May we come in?”

“Ah!” exclaimed the stout dame, smiling, “I’m glad you’ve come home, Mr Canau,” as, on her opening the door, the Frenchman entered the room, closely followed by Jared Pellet, who raised his eyebrows as he saw the traces of the tears the girls had shed.

“I only wish you’d been here, Mr Canau, I do!” exclaimed Mrs Winks; “for it’s dreadful, people coming and going on as they do and half fainting away for brandy.”

Jared looked serious as he heard the narrative of what had taken place, and then he glanced uneasily from one to the other, ending by sighing as he thought of how much trouble there was in the world; and soon after Patty and he were hurrying through the streets, with the poor-box uppermost in Jared’s thoughts, so that he had not a word for his child.

CHAPTER II.

CONFIDENTIAL.

D. WRAGG seemed to think that, in spite of his words, the mistake might be on his side if he made any complaints about the treatment he had received from the police. Once or twice he bristled up, and seemed to be making ready for a grand eruption; but second thoughts always came in time to calm him down, and those second thoughts, as a rule, related to the three dogs in the attic, the sacks of new corks, and the large flat hamper of Westphalia hams, respecting the possession of which goods he would not have liked to be too closely questioned.

That the police still had an eye upon his place he was sure; for he had many little quiet hints to that effect from friends outside, who knew a policeman in plain clothes quite as well as if he were in uniform, and who, in consequence, were rather given to laughing at the popular notion that plain-clothes

officers were able to mix here and there unknown with any society they might choose. But as the police seemed disposed to confine their attentions to a little quiet surveillance, and in other respects left him quite at peace, D. Wragg did not conceive that it would be advisable to beard the lions of the public order in their dens ; so he winked to himself, watched anxiously every bystander who struck him as being at all like a policeman in *mufti*, and contented himself with talking largely to his confidential friends, though how far he was placing confidence in them remains to be proved.

“ Look here, you know,” he said to Monsieur Canau one morning, when they had met on that neutral ground the passage, and adjourned to the shop, where they stood looking at one another in a curious distrustful fashion,—“ look here, you know ; we’re old friends, and you’ve lodged with me goodness knows how many years. I don’t mind speaking out before you. But don’t you make no mistake ; there ain’t nothing kept back by me. As to them dorgs, how could I help about the dorgs when friends comes

to me and says, 'My dorg ain't quite the thing to-day; I think I'll get you to give him a dust o' your distemper powder.' And another one says, 'I wish you'd take my dorg for a bit, and see if you think it's mänge as is a-comin' on;' while directly after comes another with a skye wiry, and says as he isn't satisfied with the sit of his dorg's ears, nor the way he sets up his tail. Well, in course I has to see to these things for 'em, my place being a sorter orspittle; and that's how them dorgs come to be up-stairs; and the way they've come on since I've had 'em is something wonderful."

Monsieur Canau nodded, and began to roll up a cigarette with clever manipulating fingers, keeping his eyes half closed the while, and smiling in a strange reserved way, that might have meant amusement, contempt, or merely sociability.

D. Wragg saw it, and became directly more impressive in his manner.

"Look here, you know," he continued, earnestly; "I don't mind speaking out before you. Don't you make no mistake; we're old friends, and this is how it is.

Don't you see, it's all a plant as that there Jack Screwby got up because I as good as kicked him out—a vagabond! Wanted to come sneaking here after—but there!" he jerked out, throwing himself into quite a convulsion of spasmodic kicks, and scattering imaginary turnip-seed by the handful;—"I won't talk about that no more. Only look here, you know; you're my lodger, and I like my lodgers to look up to their landlord with respect; so don't you make no mistake, and go for to think as them corks ain't all square, because they air—square as square."

Canau nodded, and lit his cigarette.

"Look here, you know," continued D. Wragg; "it's like this here—A man comes to you and he says, 'I want two score o' blue rocks'—pigeons, you know, for trap-shooting, a thing as you furriners can't understand, though you may come to some day. Well, he says, 'I want two score o' blue rocks, and I ain't got no money, but I've got corks;' and corks, you know, is money, if there ain't no money, same as, when there warn't no money, people used to swop. Well, then, we settles it in that way—wally for wally—he has blue

rocks, and I has corks ; and he 'll sell his blue rocks for money to the swells, and I shall sell my corks for money to a chap I knows as makes ginger-pop. And now, what's the matter ? No one can't say after that as them corks ain't square, can they ?"

" But there was the ham," said Canau, apparently disposed to cavil.

" Don't you make no mistake about that. That there ham's sweet enough ; nothing couldn't be squarer. We like ham, we do ; and Mother Winks is mortal partial to a rasher. That's why I laid in a stock."

" Um !" said Canau, exhaling a thin cloud of smoke ; " and about—about the young man ?"

" Well," said D. Wragg, looking sidewise out of his little eyes, " perhaps I worn't quite square over that ; for you see the young chap was all on the stare about little Pellet ; and as he seemed ready to buy half the shop if she was likely to be here, I did think we might as well make a few pounds extry ; for times is werry hard, you know, Mr Canau, and expenses is werry great : things runs up 'orrid."

Canau smoked fiercely, his yellow forehead

growing knit and angry-looking ; but he did not speak.

“ She didn’t like it, though,” continued D. Wragg ; “ and don’t you make no mistake : I was sorry for it afterwards, and called myself a bumble-footed old beast when I see her a cryin’. But don’t you make no mistake ; as soon as I see she didn’t like it, why, bless her little heart, I says, ‘ Don’t you go in the shop no more than you like, my pet,’ I says ; and, bless her, she said she done it for poor Janet’s sake.”

D. Wragg seemed to be so affected by his recollections that he drew out a pocket-handkerchief and removed a faint drop of moisture from the corner of one eye, and another from the right side of his nose with the stem of his pipe, Canau nodding satisfaction the while many times over—seeming, too, more tranquil of spirit, for the puffs of smoke from his cigarette were evolved far more slowly, and went curling gently upwards towards the ceiling of the shop.

“ I like natur, Mr Canau,” said D. Wragg, “ and being a spoiled child of natur myself, I always did like natur. That little Pellet’s

like, as you may say, natur's cream, all served up together. Dorgs is natur, and all these here's natur."

D. Wragg paused, inserted his left thumb in the armhole of his vest, and with the other hand gracefully waved round the stem of his pipe, indicating in turn the caged prisoners around.

"I loved natur, Mr Canau, when I was a boy, and went birds'-nestin' and ketchin' frogs instead of goin' to school, and took to the serciety of bird-ketchers, which is men of nat'ral habits, as is in some things a pleasure to know. It was my love of natur, Mr Canau, as fust set me beginning trade—selling 'edge-hogs and greenfinches and nesties of young birds in the streets; and it was natur as made me to prosper and get into this here large way of business. I'm a London man bred and born, though justice worn't done me in either case—for I'm wideawake to what's wrong with me; but I'll back myself in nat'ral history to tell anything you like, from a ork down to a tom-tit, and t'other way from a mouse up to a helephant—if so be as they're all English. For, you see, I

never went travelling, only once, when I went round for a whole year with Wombwell's nadgery, feeding the wild beasties, and helping to put the carrywans straight,—and all from a love of natur, Mr Canau, though you did get rather more natur there than you liked, 'specially as regards smells, and bein' kep' awake of a night by the hyenas a laughin', or them great furrin cats letting go like hooray—let alone the other things. And that was why I left it and took to dorgs,—selling washed pups at carriage-doors, warranted never to get no bigger. And look here," he continued, with a grin; "if ever you should take to that there trade, I'll put you up to a breed as the pups is the werry smallest in natur, and washes the whitest in natur; but as for the size they grows up to in a swell's house, where they're fed up like bloated haristocrats, with their chicking and weal cutlet, and all that sorter thing, and the colour they gets to—my!"

Mr D. Wragg chuckled loudly as he described this freak of "natur;" but it was observable that the puffs of smoke from Canau's cigarette came swiftly, as he still watched the

dealer with a strange indescribable expression.

"I love natur, Mr Canau ; and that's how it is I always did love babies and little gals, for they is natur, the prettiest bits of all. I can always kiss them little soft bits of natur, babies—if so be as they're clean, but to be dirty down here in Decadia, 'tis their natur to. But you see they ain't werry fond o' being kissed by me, not being no ways handsome. Natur never took no pains with me when she made me, you know. I don't believe as I were ever finished, and 'cordingly I wear this thick boot. But this here set out's quite upset me, Mr Canau, and I don't think I shall have any more to do with dorgs. I'll keep to birds only ; for just fancy having the police in your house, and wanting to make out as you've got a young fellow burked away somewhere, and frightening them poor girls a'most to death ! You know it's nothing but that upset as has made poor Mother Winks slip out to get that ginger-beer bottle of her's filled so many times. She don't generally do more in that way than we do with our 'bacco."

"I listen to all you say," said Monsieur Canau now, for D. Wragg was almost breathless; "but this does not explain. Where is the young man?"

"How should I know?" snarled D. Wragg, fiercely. "You don't suppose I've had any hand in it, do you? How should I know where he is?"

"But he came here, and he is gone," said the Frenchman.

"Well, suppose he is," said D. Wragg, sulkily. "He came here, and he is gone. How should I know where he is gone. Into the sewers or down the river for aught I know. Do you know where he is gone?"

"Who? who? do I know?" cried Canau, excitedly. "No, no—no, no! I know nothing. I have not seen him here or anywhere at all lately. I do not know anything about him—nothing at all."

"No more don't I," growled D. Wragg, sullenly.

"You do not? You will swear you know nothing at all of the poor young man?"

"Course I will," said D. Wragg, stoutly. "He's got dropped on to by somebody; and

no wonder. Dessay its part of Jack Screwby's lot; but I ain't going to blow upon anybody. He thought that he was very cunning in setting it down to my door so as to get it away from his; but he didn't work much out of it anyhow. The young chap was safe to come in for it though, flashing about streets like these here with his gold watches and chains and rings, when there's hundreds of hungry mouths about, and hundreds of fingers itching to snatch at 'em. And since you come to that, don't you make no mistake; I never does nothing as ain't honest. But, mind you, I don't say as Jack Screwby knows all about it. I'd just as soon say you do, for you know as you didn't like his coming."

"Who?—I?—I know? Not I—nothing at all," cried Canau, very heartily. "But I will take one more little pinch of tabaque, Monsieur Wragg," he said, with the extreme of cold politeness; "and then you will excuse—I go to my promenade."

D. Wragg gazed curiously at his sallow lodger, as he prepared himself another cigarette, till, as if feeling that he was watched, Canau stealthily raised his eyes till they en-

countered those of the dealer, when, a few moments the two men stood, each trying to read the other's thoughts, till, lowering lids, Monsieur Canau lit his cigarette, raised his pinched hat a few inches, and then slowly left the shop.

CHAPTER III.

AFTER THE SEARCH.

UPON several occasions when Monsieur Canau saw Patty home to the pleasant manufacturing shades of Duplex Street, he sought to open up this affair with Jared Pellet, so as to hear his opinion upon the subject ; but it was only to find Jared dull and abstracted, and ready to return monosyllabic answers to all that was said. Twice over he had called too, bringing with him his violin ; but upon those occasions weary-looking Tim Ruggles had been there, and no music had followed—no Mozart, not even one of Corelli's old sad-toned minor trios, with movements named after the dances of our forefathers, corantos and sarabands ; funeral marches they ought rather to have been, unless it is that music grows mellow and sad-hued with age, changing even after the fashion of wine.

Monsieur Canau used to divine that there was trouble afloat, and refrained from hinting

at the object of his visits, contenting himself with buying a couple of Jared's atrocious Roman strings, and then coming away.

"They have a bébé there," muttered Canau, "that is like a music-box ; and I think they wind him up every night just before I go, for he is always cry."

It was as patent to Monsieur Canau as to D. Wragg that the Brownjohn Street house was under police surveillance, for there was often some stranger to be seen loitering about, one very ordinary-looking individual, trying very hard not to seem as if watching the former as he went out.

But D. Wragg was not deceived in the slightest degree, for beside his great experience of 'natur,' he had attempted to acquire something of art—to wit, police art—enough to enable him to point out, with the accompaniment of a peculiar wink, the plain-clothes officer to his French lodger, who had, however, only replied by a contemptuous shrug of the shoulders, and a look in another direction.

But D. Wragg did not look another way, evidently bent upon wearing the aspect of

utter defiance of the law. He stood now at his shop-door fiercely smoking, giving himself twitches and jerks that quite scared such of his stock-in-trade as were in close proximity, and sent his dogs shrinking back, snapping and snarling, whenever he turned their way.

Mr John Screwby and he had encountered more than once — the former gentleman making a practice of insulting the dealer; and, as if out of revenge for his non-success in obtaining the two hundred pounds reward, staring up at the front of the house, or making believe, with a grin, to peer down into the cellar,—movements which made D. Wragg, under the idea that he was gnashing his teeth like an ordinary mortal, snap and snarl like a flea-bitten terrier.

Upon this day, it was fated that, as soon as Monsieur Canau was out of sight, Mr John Screwby should appear loafing along the opposite side of the road, so far from upright in his conduct, that he rubbed his right shoulder here and there against wall and window-frame as he passed. His cap was drawn down over his ears, a piece of straw

in his mouth, and his hands right above the wrists in his pockets, and their owner staring heavily here and there after something fresh, till he came in sight of D. Wragg. Now he grinned spitefully, and, walking slowly on, stopped at last opposite the dealer's house, to stare heavily up at the attic windows, shading his eyes, leaning a little on this side and a little on that, as if eagerly searching for something to be seen. Then, according to custom, he crossed the road to gaze for a moment through the cellar-grating, holding one hand to his ear as if listening attentively; and then fixing his eyes upon the dirty sash of the window seen through the grating, he began to walk slowly backwards and forwards, totally ignoring the presence of D. Wragg the while.

"There'll be a row directly, Mr Jack Screwby," said the dealer, with a sharp snarl, as he stood watching his enemy's actions.

Mr Screwby took not the slightest notice of the speaker, only stopped short as if he had caught a glimpse of something.

"I wonder wot they've done with the pore chap!" he said at last, in quite a loud

voice. "I shouldn't be a bit s'prised if they've berried 'im in the kitchin."

"If I could have my way with you, young fellow, I'd serve you out for this!" said D. Wragg, shaking his fist, to the great amusement of a small crowd fast collecting.

"What 'ud you do with me, eh?" said Screwby, with a grin. "Burke me, like the pore chap as come arter his dorg, eh?"

"You wouldn't dare to talk like that there, Jack Screwby, if I was a man of your own size and age," said D. Wragg, viciously.

"P'raps I should — p'raps I shouldn't," sneered Screwby. "But how about the pore young man?"

D. Wragg made a terrier-like movement, as if about to rush at a bull-dog, to the great delight of the crowd, especially as at that moment the thick new boot, freshly completed by Mr Purkis, caught in the grating, and D. Wragg nearly fell.

"Don't let him come a-nigh you," said Screwby, grinning, "or he'll serve you same as he did the pore young man."

Here there was another shout, and the popular feeling seemed to be growing so

strong, that, raging within himself, D. Wragg began to think it would be prudent to retreat, and he did so, followed by a loud jeering laugh.

But even now he was not to have peace, for he had hardly reached the sanctuary of his own room before a couple of small boys, probably incited thereto by Mr John Screwby, thrust their heads in at the shop-door, to roar, at the utmost pitch of their shrill treble—

“Who burked the boy?” fleeing the next moment as if for their very lives, on hearing the scraping of the dealer’s chair.

This is merely a sample of the unpleasantness that the little dealer was called upon to bear; for Mr Screwby was exceedingly bitter against the house of Wragg, inasmuch as there had been no discovery made—not even the trace or tiny ravelling of a thread sufficient to commence a clue; and what was more, Sergeant Falkner had strongly negatived the necessity for rewarding him, even in the slightest degree—though, unseen by the police, Clayton had slipped a sovereign into the man’s hand.

But what was a sovereign as compared

with the golden heap that two hundred would have made? And then what things it would have bought! Mr John Screwby had already gloated over several articles—notably a brown fur cap, dyed catskin, which he coveted hugely; but now the whole of his air-built castle was swept away; and to make matters ten times worse, he had been requested by the sergeant not to show himself anywhere near a certain number in Regent Street any more.

This last was rather a serious command, for it was indeed a special order, although couched in the form of a request. To a gentleman in Mr Screwby's circumstances, matters might turn out very unpleasantly if he slighted the sergeant's impressive words.

Under these circumstances, though not caring a jot for the fate of Lionel Redgrave, Mr John Screwby, failing money, determined to have the full measure of his revenge, brimming over, if it were possible, and therefore he joined himself heart and soul to the party whose every effort was directed towards the elucidation of the

mystery which had prostrated Sir Francis. For after striving most manfully to fight against bodily weakness, the old baronet lay at his son's chambers in a state upon which the medical men consulted declined to give a decided opinion.

To a bystander Sir Francis seemed weak and perfectly helpless, but a few words relating to information would galvanise him into life once more ; and so it was that one afternoon, when a rough, water-side-looking fellow presented himself, Sir Francis immediately ordered him to be shown up.

CHAPTER IV.

THE NEW CLUE.

"HE's been out again, sir," said Mr Stiff to Clayton, as he entered the passage.

"What! Sir Francis?"

"Yes, sir. A man came from down Bermondsey way, and said he had some news, and I daren't refuse him. You know, sir, it might be valuable, and it would not do for me to be shutting off the very bit of information that might be worth anything."

"What kind of man was it?" asked Harry.

"Poor Jack sort of fellow, sir, from river stairs; and I told Sir Francis, as he told me to tell him of everybody who called only this morning again, and I showed the man up. Then they went off together in a cab, and he's just come back, sir."

"What madness—in his state!" exclaimed Harry, and he hurried up the stairs to find Sir Francis seated on a low chair, with his face buried in his hands.

Sir Francis looked up as the young man entered, to gaze at him in a confused, dazed way, as if he did not quite comprehend the meaning of his coming.

"Was not this rather foolish of you, Sir Francis?" said Harry, gently. "Indeed you are in no condition for going out. I see how it is, though, and I feared it when you put in the advertisement; the very name of the chambers in Regent Street was enough to bring down a host of reward-seekers. Why did you not take my advice, and refer them to the police?"

"I couldn't, Clayton—I couldn't," groaned Sir Francis. "You do not know what I feel, or you would not speak to me as you do. Poor lad!—poor lad!"

Harry was silent for a few minutes, and then he spoke again.

"It was, of course, a useless quest, sir?"

"I can't tell—I don't know," said Sir Francis, feebly. "I am confused and troubled in the head, Clayton, and I have been trying hard to recollect what it all was, and what I did; but as soon as I grasp anything, it seems to glide from me again."

"Lie down, sir," said Harry, gently, and he passed an arm beneath that of the old man.

"Not yet—not yet—not yet, Clayton. I think I have it now. Yes, that is it—I have it. The man came and said they had found some one by the river-side, and I went half way with him; and then I suppose I must have fainted, for I can recollect no more, only that I was brought back—or no, I think I must have found my way back by myself. This weakness is a cruel trial just now."

"You must put your strength to the test no more, sir," said Harry, firmly. "Try and believe that I will do all that is possible. Indeed, I will leave no stone unturned."

"I know it, Clayton—I know it!" exclaimed Sir Francis; "and indeed I do try, but this suspense is at times more than I can bear."

At the young man's persuasion, he now went to lie down, giving up in a weary vacant manner the effort to recollect where the man had been about to take him. He tried once to recall the names, till Harry felt a dread of delirium setting in, and it was only by his promising to follow up the clue that

had been freshly opened out, that he kept the afflicted father to his couch.

Once more alone, Harry rang for Stiff, who, however, could only repeat what he had before said, and his querist was puzzled as to what should be the next steps taken.

The problem was solved by the water-side man himself, who came, he said, to see if the gentleman was well enough to go now.

"He turned ill in the cab, did he not?" said Clayton.

"Yes, sir; would go in a cab, he would. I don't like 'em—ready to choke yer, they are; but he wouldn't come on a 'bus. 'Fore we'd gone far, he turns as white as his hanky, and shuts his eyes curus like, and gets all nohow in what he was a saying; but he says, he does, 'Take me back, and come agen.' So I brought him back, and now I've comed agen."

"And now, what is your news?" said Harry. "The gentleman has placed it in my hands."

The man looked curiously at him for a few minutes, and then rubbed the bridge of his nose with a rough hand.

"But you see, sir, this is a matter o' offering rewards for some one as is missing, and I've got a mate in this here job. For, you know, as soon as ever there's a notice up o' that sort, my mate and I begins to look out, so as to try if we can't find what's missing, and get what's offered. Now, I ask your parding, sir, but I should like to know who you may be, and what you've got to do with it at all? S'pose I leads you to it, shall we get the ready?"

"You may deal with me precisely as you did with the gentleman you saw before. You know for yourself that he is too ill to leave the house, and he has deputed me to act for him, as I told you."

"True for you, sir—I did see it; and as you seem to be a gent as is all right, let's go."

A cab was brought, and, not without a glance at his unsavoury companion, Harry followed him into the vehicle.

"Hadn't yer better let me ride outside, sir?" said the man, looking at the stuffed and cushioned interior with an aspect of disgust.

"No," said Harry; "I want to know what more you have to say respecting this affair."

The man gave a tug at an imaginary forelock, and then waited apparently to be questioned, while Harry took in his outward appearance at a glance.

He was rough and dirty enough to have passed for the veriest vagabond in existence, but all the same he did not seem as if he belonged to that portion of society that has been dubbed "the dangerous classes;" for there was a good open aspect to the brown face, and though the Bardolphian nose told tales of drams taken to keep out the cold river mists, on either side a frank grey eye looked you full in the face; while, greatest test of all, the fellow's palms were hard and horny, and ended by fingers that had been chipped, bent, bruised, and distorted by hard labour.

"Well, sir," said the man, "I ain't got much to tell you; only that, seeing the reward up, my mate and me thought we might as well have it as any one else, so we set to and"——

"You found him?" exclaimed Harry, eagerly.

"Well, sir, that's for you to say when you

sees him. My mate generally sees people about these sorter things, but I come to-day ; and a fine job I had to get to know where you lived, for I'd forgot the number ; but I found out at last from a gal cleaning the door-step close by. It don't do for us, you know, to go to no police—they humbugs a man about so ; and I don't know now whether they ain't been down on my mate, 'cos you see we didn't want to say nothing to them till as how you 'd been and seen it."

Harry shuddered at that last word "it ;" there was something so repellent, though at the same time expressive, in the one tiny syllable *it* now, not *him* ; and again he shuddered as he thought of the ordeal through which he had to go. He roused himself at last, though, to ask a few questions as the cab drove on, the driver making his way over the river to the Surrey side ; and, as soon as they were in the comparative silence of the narrow streets, Harry learned that during the past night his companion had been successful in his search, and that what he had sought lay now in a boat-house far down the Thames in the low-lying district

where wharf and dock and rickety stairs, or steam-boat pier, alternate with muddy-pile and drain, with bank after bank of slime, over which the water of the swift tide seemed to glide and play, here and there washing it up into a foul frothy scum, compounded of the poisonous refuse daily cast into the mighty stream.

It was a long ride, down deplorable looking streets, where wretched tumble-down tenements, with frowsy aspect and dingy, patchy windows, were dominated by lordly warehouses, with great gallows-like cranes at every floor—floors six, seven, and eight stories from the ground—from whose open doors men stood gazing down as coolly as if they were on *terra firma*, though a moment's giddiness must have precipitated them into the street below.

Harry saw all this as they rode slowly on, in spite of the pre-occupation of his thoughts, as he tried to nerve himself for the task to come. Probably his brain was abnormally excited, and the pictures of the panorama passing the cab-window seemed to force themselves upon him. Now he was appar-

ently interested in the places where the ship-chandlers hung out their wares; the next minute, the gate of a dock, with its scores of labourers waiting for a job, took his attention; or low public-houses and beer-shops, with their lounging knots of customers, half labourer, half sailor, or lighterman, with the inevitable brazen, high-cheeked, muscular woman. A little farther on, and he would be gazing at a clump of masts rising from behind high walls. Then came comparatively decent dwellings with a vast display of green paint, and to the doors brass knockers of the most dazzling lustre. In nearly every parlour-window he saw was a parrot of grey or gaudy hue swinging or climbing about. In front of more than one house were oyster forts with sham cannon; while others again had flagstaffs rigged up with halyards, vane, and pennant, looking down upon the bruised figure-head of a ship which ornamented the neighbour's garden.

Maritime population with maritime tastes, the houses of trading skippers and mates of small vessels. Sea-chests could be seen in barrows at every turn, along with the big

bolster-like bag that forms the orthodox portmanteau for a sailor's kit. Here and there he passed, in full long-shore togs, the dwellers in the sea-savouring houses—passing along the pavement with one eye to windward, and the true nautical roll which told of sea-legs brought ashore.

On still, with the rattling of the wretched cab and its jangling windows seeming to form a tune which repeated itself ever to his ears. The man, from watching his companion, had taken to drumming the top of the door with his hard fingers, blackened and stained with tar, while from time to time he thrust out his head to give some direction or another to the driver, whose eccentric course seemed as if it would never end.

At last, though, the guide seemed to grow excited, giving his orders more frequently, the cab being slowly driven in and out of rugged, tortuous lanes, from one of which it had to back out, so as to give place to a waggon laden with ships' spars and cables. Narrow ways seemed the rule, and down these the cab went jolting, till the driver drew up short at the end of a wretched alley.

Here the guide dismounted.

"Can't get no furrer with cabs here, sir," he said ; "we must walk the rest on it."

Harry told the driver to wait ; and then, in a troubled state of mind, he followed his conductor in and out by wharf and crazy water-side shed, where paths were wet and muddy, and the few people seen looked poverty-stricken and repulsive. Tall walls heaved upward to shut out the light and air from the low, damp dwellings. A few yards farther and there was the din of iron as rivets were driven cherry-red into the plates of some huge metallic sea-ark. And again a little farther, and they were where corn ran in teeming golden cascades out of shoots to lighter or granary. Farther still, and the rap, rap, incessant rap, of the caulkers' hammers were heard as they drove in the tarry oakum between the seams of the wooden vessels.

Iron-workers, black and grimy, painters, carpenters, rope-makers, all were busy here. Steam hissed and roared and shrieked, as it escaped from some torturing engine in white wreaths, like the ghost of dead water hurrying to its heaven of clouds far above the grimy

earth. All forced itself upon Harry Clayton's brain, as he followed his conductor to where there were loose stones and mud beneath his feet, the black rushing river on his left hand, and on his right slimy piles, black and green and brown, with the bolts protruding, and iron rings hanging from their sides, all eaten and worn away.

There was a channel leading to some dock close by, and foul water was babbling noisily down through a pair of sluice-falls, and this too struck him painfully as the plashing fell upon his ear.

All passed away, though, but the one shudder-engendering idea of that which he had come to see; for a rough harsh voice, proceeding from another amphibious muddy being, said :—

“ You 've found some one, then ? ”

“ Ay ! ” was the response from Harry Clayton's conductor; and making to the right, the young man found himself beside a low, wet, half-rotten shed.

CHAPTER V.

WHAT THE SHED HELD.

HARRY CLAYTON felt his breath come thick and fast as he caught sight of the low place by his side. It was a boat-house evidently, and was roughly built of the hole-filled planks torn from the side of some ship taken to the breaker's yard. The door was secured with a large rusty padlock, and the amphibious-looking man, now introduced as "my mate," had evidently been doing duty as a sentry, seated upon a post, and smoking a long clay pipe, troubled not in the slightest degree that within a few feet, dripping, soddened, battered by contact with pier and pile, lay the nameless dead, separated from him only by that badly-hung door facing the river, and through whose rifts and cracks and treenail-holes the interior could easily have been viewed.

The strongest of nerve might have shuddered as the man who had been keeping guard noisily unfastened the padlock, drew it

from the staple, and was about to throw open the door of the hovel, when Harry abruptly arrested him.

"Are you sure that this answers to the description given?" he said, hoarsely.

"Sure on it! Oh yes, sir; that's right enough. You needn't go in without you like: you may take our word for it. But as soon as you're saddersfied, we must go and tell the perlice, or else there'll be a rumpus. They won't like it as it is, and'll be wanting to go in for the reward; but we looks to you, sir, as a genleman, to make all that right."

"I'll see justice done you," said Harry, still hesitating.

"Thanky, sir! You see, about them police, there's the inquiss, and the doctor, and the jury, and all of them to see it; but you may take our word for it as it's all right: it's him, sure enough."

"How—how do you suppose it happened?—by accident?"

"Well, sir," said the first man, "it don't look very accidental when a poor chap's got two knife-holes in his chest, and a cut across the head enough to do for any man. You may

call it a accident if you like, but accidents don't turn a chap's pockets inside out, and take his watch and ring."

Harry glanced again shudderingly at the door. Should he go in, or should he stay? It was cruel work, but he had promised the father, and the duty must be performed. He could not help dreading to gaze upon the fair frank face that he knew of old; and as he thought, he recalled it, with its insolent smile of triumph, when they parted at the station. And now, barbarously mutilated, sullied with mud and water, perhaps it would be so changed as to be beyond the power of recognition.

And yet he knew that it must be done—that it was impossible for him to take the men's judgment, which must needs be of the most partial character.

There was nothing else for it, then, but to go, and he motioned to the man to throw open the door.

"I don't know as I'd go, sir, if I was you," said the man who had been his guide. "Give it up, sir, and take our word for it. We're used to this sorter thing; but it ain't

pleasant to look at. I wouldn't go in, sir, if I was you."

The man became so importunate at last, on seeing Harry's firmness, that the latter grew angry, for he had now nerved himself for his task; and without waiting to hear more, he muttered the two words, "Poor Lionel!" threw back the door, and strode in.

Almost as soon as he had crossed the threshold the door swung to behind him, leaving the place in semi-obscurity, for it was only illumined by the faint pencils of light that streamed in through the treenail-holes of the old planks,

But there was light enough to show Harry that he was standing in a place whose floor was of muddy shingle stones, with a plank laid down the centre, worn and furrowed by the long coursing to and fro upon it of the iron keel of some boat. A few broken oars and a small skiff's mast were leaned against the side in company with a boat-hook and a rude pole. Upon a peg hard by was a coil of rope and a grapnel; and again, in other parts, coils of rope and four-fluked, sharp-pointed grapnels, which made the visitor shudder as he thought

of their purpose. Pieces of old iron, fragments of chain, scraps of rope, a ragged old ship's fender, and some pieces of drift wood, muddy, sodden, and jagged with old red water-corroded nails, were all that remained to take his attention, as his eyes wandered round the place, studiously avoiding and leaving to the last that which he had expressly come to see.

Oars, boathook, mast, cordage, they were all there, but where was the boat's sail? It was not in the boat—that he had seen when outside with the men.

Harry Clayton felt as if his mind were divided, and one portion were set in array against the other, questioning and responding, for the response was plain enough, and he knew that answer, though he had not seen that sail—could not see it now.

As he stood gazing upon the faint rays streaming down from between two loose tiles, falling here straight, there aslant, but all to cross and form a curious network of light with the rays pouring in from the side, he told himself that he was a coward; but the defensive part of his intelligence whispered

in return, had this been the body of a stranger lying at his feet he could have calmly and sadly gazed upon the dead. But it was the dread of looking upon his friend—upon the man whom of late, but for a hard battle with self, he could have struck down as an enemy—to look upon him cut off in the flower of his youth, and by some dreadful death, in the midst of a wild freak, perhaps of dissipation.

Clayton paused, and he repeated these words—

“Had it been the body of a stranger!”

Then, as if a flash of light had illumined the meaning of those words, he started. “Had it been the body of a stranger!” Why, after all, might it not be the earthly clay of some one unknown. It would be horrible still; but if he could bear back the tidings to that stricken old man that Lionel might still be living—that this was not he—how he could fervently say, “Thank Heaven!”

He stepped forward to where an old patched sail lay covering something in a pool of mud and water. The sailcloth was stained

and dabbled with the mud ; and a strange sense of shrinking seized upon Clayton as he stooped to lift one end.

He knew which to lift, for through the bare old cloth the human form could plainly be distinguished. It was not much to do to raise that cloth at the end for a brief moment. He could recognise Lionel in an instant ; and nerving himself once more, he stooped hastily, raised the covering, and dropped it again, to mutter—nay, to exclaim loudly, with a fervour of tone that bespoke the intensity of the speaker's feelings—"Thank God!"

Harry turned hastily away, and forced open the door to admit the light of day, and to confront the bearer of the tidings and his mate ; for his glance had been but a momentary one. He had stood at the back, as he raised the sail, and in that moment's glance he had seen no horrors—none of the distortions left sometimes by a fearful death ; he had seen but one thing, and that was—

The man's hair was black !

CHAPTER VI.

RIVER-SIDE HOPES.

HARRY CLAYTON hurriedly made his way back to the chambers, where he found Sir Francis hastily walking up and down the room.

“Ah! you are back!” he said, impatiently. “I fell asleep for quite two hours, and then I should have come after you, only the address the man gave had quite glided from my memory. It seems, Clayton, as if my head were so full of this one trouble that it will hold nothing else. But what news?”

“None, sir,” said Harry, quietly. “It was, thank Heaven, a mistake.”

“I don’t know, Clayton—I don’t know. This suspense is almost more agonising than the knowledge that my poor boy had really been found dead. I feel, at times, that I cannot bear it much longer. You saw this—this”——

“Yes, sir; I saw the body of some poor

creature lying in a boat-shed ; but it was not the one we seek."

"Are you sure? You were not mistaken? You really did look to make sure?"

Harry smiled faintly, as he thought of his irresolution, and the way in which he had held back ; and then he answered, calmly—

"Yes, Sir Francis ; I made perfectly sure."

It was pitiful to see the old man's trouble—the constant agitation, the anxious gaze, the nervous restless motion of his hands—as he turned over some communication—some letter professing to give information respecting a young man in some far-off part of England or Wales—every despatch exciting hopes that were soon found to be perfectly baseless.

At length, after much persuasion, Sir Francis agreed to lie down, on the condition that Clayton would stay, ready to answer any communication that might arrive.

"You know, my dear boy, these things always will arrive when we are absent," he said, pitifully.

"Trust me, Sir Francis," was the reply.

"I am indeed doing everything possible to lead to a discovery."

The old man did not trust himself to speak ; but wringing Harry's hand, he despairingly left the room.

In the meantime, Harry's sudden departure from before the boat-shed, far down on the muddy banks of the Thames, had not been allowed to pass uncanvassed by the two rough men, the seekers for such ghastly waifs and strays.

"Suv'rin," said the one who had acted as guide, in answer to a query,

"Air you sure as there worn't two?"

"I am," said the other, with a wave of his pipe-stem. "Why, if there'd been two, wouldn't you have heard 'em chink when he stuffed 'em in my hand?" said Sam, not at all relying upon the known integrity of his character for refutation of this sideways charge that he had kept back portion of the reward. "There's what he give me," he continued, holding out a sovereign in his horny palm ; "and we'll get it changed as soon as you like."

"Yes," said the other, speaking indistinctly,

on account of the pipe between his lips ;
“ we ’ll get it changed afore we go on to the station.”

As he spoke, he carefully chained and padlocked the door of the shed, smoking coolly enough the while.

“ I ain’t seen anything else up—no notice, nor nothing,” said Sam ; “ and we mustn’t wait no longer before givin’ information, or there ’ll be a row.”

“ No, there ain’t nothing up,” said the other, pocketing his key, and removing his pipe to expectorate. “ I ’ve been looking, and there’s ony a bill up about a woman. He was precious pertickler. Why wouldn’t this one do ? All they wanted was some one to give a decent Christun buryin’ to ; and this here poor chap would ha’ done as well as any other one, to ease their minds with.”

“ But you see he’s got black hair, and on the bill it says fair curly hair,” said Sam. “ I was half afeard it wouldn’t do.”

“ Yah ! what does the colour of the hair matter ?” grumbled the other. “ I mean to say its reg’larly swindlin’ us out of two ’undred pound. He’d ha’ done as well as any other ;

and they might have 'ad their inkwist, and sat on him, and sworn to him, and said he was found drowned ; and there'd ha' been a comfortable feelin', and they needn't ha' troubled themselves no more."

" Well, let 's go and give notice ; and then we'll change this here, and have a wet—eh, lad ? "

" Ah ! may as well," said the other, removing his pipe to draw an anticipatory hand across his mouth. " Let 's see—tall and fair—curly hair—eh, Sam ? Well, perhaps something may turn up yet time enough for us. That 'ere would have done safe enough if his hair had been right colour. Better luck next time—eh, lad ? "

" Ah ! dessay," said Sam, forcing the sovereign right to the bottom of his pocket. " Two 'undred pound reward ! We ought to have had it, old man ; but who knows but what something mayn't turn up yet ? "

CHAPTER VII.

D. WRAGG.

THERE was far from being peace in the house of Wragg, for the place had gained a most unenviable notoriety. Wrong-doings were prevalent enough in Decadia, but they were ordinary wrong-doings, and those who were guilty of peculiar acts were, as a rule, patted on the back by the fraternity. In fact, if 'Arry Burge, or Tom Gagan, or Micky Green was taken for a burglary or robbery with violence, there would always be a large following of admiring companions to see the culprit off to the station, to be present at the hearing, and to give him a friendly cheer during his handcuffed walk to the black van. They had no very great objection to a murder, and more than once a good hundred of neighbours had waited all night outside Newgate to see Bob, or Ben, or Joe, die game at eight o'clock in the morning. But this mysterious disappearance work was something not to be tolerated.

There was too much of the Burke and Hare, and body-snatching about it; and consequently the name of Wragg stank in the nostrils of the clean-handed dwellers in Decadia, and the house in Brownjohn Street enjoyed for the time being but little peace.

D. Wragg could not show himself outside; and as for Canau, he had been mobbed twice, to return storming and angry, ready to threaten all sorts of vengeance upon his persecutors, foremost amongst whom was Mr John Screwby.

This gentleman seemed to have devoted himself heart and soul to the task of keeping alive in the Decadian mind the fact that Lionel Redgrave had been seen to go into the Brownjohn Street house, and had not been seen to come out; though all this rested on Mr Screwby's assertion, since he brought no corroborative evidence to bear—only spoke of the matter right and left, even haranguing excited mobs, who would have needed but little leading to have made them wreck D. Wragg's dwelling, and administer lynch-law to its inhabitants.

In fact, instead of the matter being a nine-

days' wonder, and then passing off, interest in the mystery seemed to be ever on the increase; and a feeling of dread more than once seized all the members of the household lest some terrible evil should befall them.

"I tell you what it is, young fellow," said P. C. Brace one evening to Mr John Screwby, whom he had warned to move on, just at a time when he was haranguing a pack of boys,—
"I tell you what it is, young fellow; if you get opening your mouth so wide about all this here, people will begin to think as you know as much about it as any one else."

Mr John Screwby's jaw fell, and he stood gazing speechlessly at the policeman, as that worthy wagged his head expressively, to indicate the words "Move on;" and then, without uttering another syllable, on he moved, rubbing his jaw with one hand, pulling his cap a little more over his ears, and in various ways acting as if not quite at peace within himself.

It was impossible for those within the house not to observe how they were looked upon by their neighbours. The trade of the

shop had dropped off day by day, till there was absolutely nothing doing, although D. Wragg sat hour after hour smoking his pipe behind the counter, and muttering to himself.

Even Mrs Winks looked troubled and scared, coming up one morning from the cellar-kitchen, with her curl-papers all limp, to declare in confidence to Janet that she “dursen’t go down no more, for she had heard a noise;” and then, in a very low whisper, she declared her conviction that there was something wrong.

This was soon after daybreak one washing-day; and from that time Mrs Winks decided in favour of the central portions of the house, refusing absolutely either to ascend to the attics or descend to the basement.

“But is it not foolish?” said Janet to her, one day. “What can there be up-stairs or down-stairs to hurt you?”

“There! don’t ask me, child,” exclaimed Mrs Winks. “I don’t know; I only know what I think. There’s something wrong about the place; and you can feel it in the air; and if it wasn’t for you, child, I wouldn’t stop another day—see if I would!”

That day passed in a cheerless, dreary way, but not quite in peace, for more than once a rude shout or laugh made Janet start from her seat, and stand trembling for what might be to come. But the demonstrations proved to be harmless, and no more offensive than they could be made by jeering words, and the hurling into the shop of a few stones and broken ginger-beer bottles, occasioning a vast amount of fluttering amongst the birds, and a fierce yelping from the prisoned dogs.

The night came at last, and D. Wragg was heard stumping and jerking about the house, as if busy examining all fastenings, and putting out the gas; and then there was a knock at the outer door—a well-known tap—to which Janet hastened to reply, and admitted Canau, who entered sideways, with the door only opened a few inches, and then closed it hastily, as if in dread of pursuit, when he stood looking at Janet, and wiping the perspiration from his forehead with an old silk handkerchief.

“Is there any news?” he faltered, looking hard at the deformed girl the while.

"No," she replied, hoarsely; "there is no news."

D. Wragg opened the back-room door at this moment, to glance out hastily, when seeing who it was, he re-closed the door and waited till his lodgers had gone up-stairs, when his head once more appeared like that of a rat from its hole, and he listened till all was still before again closing his door.

Silence fell upon the house at last; not, though, that all its inmates were at rest, for Canau lay for long enough sleepless, and turning over thought after thought. D. Wragg, too, was rather uneasy that night, while to Janet the hours dragged heavily on.

At last, though, in spite of her agitation, Janet was sleeping soundly, while, soon after daybreak, D. Wragg was astir, to gently draw up his blind and inspect the morning, a proceeding that did not seem to prove highly satisfactory, for he groaned more than sighed, shook his head, jerked about as he crossed the room, and then, without his boots, he stepped into the passage, and began to climb the stairs, pausing, though, upon each

landing, to listen whether any one else were stirring.

But as far as he could judge, every one was sunk in that sound slumber of early morn,—Mrs Winks loudly announcing her state as he passed her door.

There seemed to be a great deal of indecision, though, in D. Wragg's movements; his haltings were many, and the cautious manner in which he peered about seemed to indicate that the errand upon which he was bound was one of no trivial import.

At last, though, he climbed to the top, stood listening for awhile, and then entered the attic, closing the door carefully behind him, but apparently taking no steps to make it fast.

D. Wragg had not been out of sight five minutes, before there was the soft grating noise of a key turning in the wards of a lock; then there was a loud crack, and a door below opened to give exit to Monsieur Canau, who stood in the doorway listening for a few moments, and then, shoes in hand, descended softly and swiftly to the bottom of the house. On reaching the cellar-kitchen, he lit a candle,

and after unbolting a door, passed under the area grating, with his pinched old hat held lanthorn-wise over the candle ; and then, drawing open a second door, he entered a large cellar, in one corner of which was the small stock of coals in use for the house, and in another the ashes and refuse.

But Monsieur Canau had hardly a look for these ; he merely glanced round the place, and then drew back the fastening of the inner cellar, one which seemed to extend far beneath the street.

His candle flickered here, and burned dimly for a few moments, as he walked backwards and forwards in the cobwebbed, vaulted place, holding his candle low down, and examining the reeking floor, particularly in one spot—the furthest corner from the door. This he scraped a little with his hands, then stamped upon several times ; held the candle down to see what impression his feet had made ; and then, taking up a rough piece of wood, he carefully drew it backwards and forwards over where he had stamped, and lastly, extinguished his candle. He then closed the cellar doors, crossed the area, and,

after leaving all below as he had found it, hurried up-stairs once more, but, in spite of his years, with all the activity of a boy.

He stopped by his own room, entered it for a few moments, and then reappeared, to step up softly to the attic landing, where he again paused to listen attentively for fully five minutes. But though Mrs Winks was as stertorous as ever in her breathing, not another sound was to be heard in the house ; and laying his hand upon the attic latch, Canau raised it very gently, not the eighth of an inch at a time, coaxing the door, as it were, to open without noise, till, by slow degrees, he had pressed it back sufficiently far to allow the passage of his head, when, cautiously inserting it to peer round, the door was pressed back upon his neck, holding it between the edge and the door-jamb, while, within a few inches, and gazing malignantly into his eyes, he found himself suddenly confronted by D. Wragg.

CHAPTER VIII.

JARED'S TROUBLE.

AND the box not been touched since," muttered Jared Pellet,—“not been touched since;” and he repeated the words which he had heard from Mr Timson but a few days before, as he stood in the porch of the old church, looking straight before him in a hopeless dreamy way. He had had no occasion to be there, no business to be there; for he had conducted the service for the last time, and on the next or the following day he would be called upon to give up his key. But that organ seemed to draw him there, so that he dreamed over it, clung to it, as he recalled that he must so soon give up his duties, and in such a fashion.

They knew nothing, suspected nothing at home; they only said that he practised oftener than ever,—that he hurried through little jobs to get to the church, where he spent long hours gazing in the reflector, and

dreaming of the past and future, or making the passengers in the street pause and listen to the grand old strains. At times, he could scarcely bring himself to believe that it was true; but the inexorable crept on, till he could feel that he was only there upon sufferance, and blamed his want of pride in not giving up before.

The Reverend John had ceased to preach monetary discourses, and bowed austere when once he encountered Jared, who shrank back, although he had fully determined to address him. Mr Timson, too, gave him no further opportunities for conversation, but passed him at a half-trot, with both hands under his coat-tails, giving him short, sharp, defiant nods. Even old Purkis grew strange and constrained, backing away from him, and bursting forth into a dew of perspiration which entailed no end of mopping and wiping. As for Mrs Ruggles, she never had been in the habit of bending to sociability, so that her stiff formality was passed unnoticed.

No; there was no keeping away from the old place now; and day after day, Ichabod grew richer with the many coppers he earned

as Jared tortured the instrument into the giving forth of wondrous wails and groans; no jubilant strains, but all sorrowful, and in harmony with his broken spirit.

Twelve o'clock! Ichabod dismissed, and the hour just struck by the old church clock in a halting broken-winded manner, as if the job was too much for it, while an ordinary listener would have been tired out before it reached half way. But Jared listened, and shivered and shuddered too, as, after beating laboriously its heaviest task, it set in motion certain hammers which knocked "Adeste Fidelis" out of the bells, beaten out notes that came in a jerky, disjointed fashion, and muddled up with their rests—now one in its place, now three or four blundered together, as if in a hurry to finish a performance of which they were heartily ashamed.

But Jared stood it out, telling himself that most likely it was for the last time. Then he tried the church-door to make sure that it was fast, and afterwards slunk off slowly, and apparently believing that people could read the crime of which he was accused branded upon his forehead. Perhaps that was why

he crushed his hat down over his eyes, and bent his head so as to encounter neither scowl of avoidance nor pitying glance.

In Duplex Street at last! and pausing to pull his face three or four different ways so as to get upon it a pleasant expression before inserting his latch-key; and, entering, to stand rubbing his feet upon the worn old mat, which had to be held steady with one foot while the other was cleaned, and had been so affected by time that, hydra-fashion, it was fast turning itself into two mats of a smaller size. Then, it took some time, to take off the old black kid gloves, which Jared had cut down into mittens in consequence of finger dilapidations, or, as he said, to keep his hands warm when playing in the fireless church.

But there were cheery voices ascending the stairs, so putting away his last sigh, like his umbrella in a corner, he descended to the kitchen, and tried to enter, but the door-handle only turned round and round, and would not move the latch. Directly after, though, there came the sound as of some one wriggling it back with a knife-blade.

"There, don't touch me," cried Patty, "or I shall flour you all over."

The warning came too late, for Jared had already taken her in his arms to place a couple of kisses upon her blooming cheeks.

"There, I knew I should," she continued; "and if I touch it I shall make it worse. But, father dear, I'd have that lock mended, or we shall all be fastened in some day."

"Ah!" said Jared. "Now, if it could be repaired with glue, I might manage it myself."

But as that seemed impossible, Jared began to hum a tune, his thoughts the while hanging upon the subject of his dismissal, as he wondered whether they had yet any inkling of the secret which oppressed him.

"Time enough for them to know when all is over, and I've given up the keys," he muttered; "for even yet something may be found out. If not," he thought, bitterly, "we must starve."

"Has the vicar been or sent?" he said, in husky tones, but assuming all the indifference possible.

"No," said Mrs Jared; "I've been think-

ing about him all the morning. Isn't he late?"

Jared thought he was, and said so. But all the same, he had not expected him, only a cheque for his last quarter's salary—money always heretofore paid to the day, though it was not likely that upon this occasion the vicar would follow out his old pleasant custom and bring the cheque himself. But Jared tried to persuade himself that even that was possible, for drowning men are said to clutch at straws, and Jared was drowning fast. He had kept his head above water a long time, but now all seemed at an end, and the waters of tribulation appeared about to close over him.

Mrs Pellet and her daughter continued to be occupied in domestic affairs, while now, as if Jared's misery were not great enough, the straw seemed to be snatched from the drowning man as there came the terrible thought—Suppose that the vicar should not send at all? suppose that, taking into consideration how he had refrained from prosecuting, he should consider the quarter's salary as forfeited?

Not a heavy sum certainly, but to Jared

the want of it would be ruin piled upon ruin, a cruel heel crushing the head already in the dust.

“ They told me to clear myself, to prove that they were wrong—and what have I done ? But, there ! absurd ! They could not keep back the money ; it would not be legal.”

But suppose that, legal or illegal, they kept it back to make up for the missing money, how then ? The vicar would not do such a thing, he was too kind-hearted ; but Timson might prompt him—Timson, who had always been so ready with his suspicions. He would go and tell him to his face of his cruelty to a wronged man. He dared meet him, though he now shrank from encountering the vicar. But no ; he was too hasty ; the money was not legally due until he had formally given up the organ-key. But if they did keep it back—that twelve pounds ten—could he not take legal proceedings for its recovery ? How, when they had been so lenient to him ?

“ Lenient ! ” his brow grew wrinkled as the word flashed over his mind. Was he not innocent, unless indeed he had committed the theft in his sleep—walked to the church from

sheer habit? But absurd! he was innocent. "Prove it, sir—prove it," rang in his ears, and he seemed to see before him the stiff figure of the little churchwarden, with his hands stuck beneath the tails of his coat. "Prove it, sir—prove it," and how was he to prove it?

Jared Pellet was a good actor, schooled in adversity; but on that day he was about worn out, and a less shrewd person than his wife would have seen that something was wrong. She noted it before he had been in long, and attributed it to the fact that they had not a penny in hand. He tried to laugh and be cheery, but his attempts were of so sorry a nature that Mrs Jared looked hard at him, when he seemed so guilty of aspect, that he was glad to call in the aid of a pocket-handkerchief, and make a feeble attempt at a sneeze.

"You won't mind a makeshift dinner to-day?" said Patty, intent upon her task of preparing the repast.

Needless question to one who had practised the art of making shift for so many years, and to whom a good dinner was an exception to the rule.

“Been wanted while I was out?” said Jared, after declaring that he should enjoy the makeshift above all things. “Been wanted?” for it was a pleasant fiction with Jared that he did a large business in the musical instrument line, and that it was not safe for him to be away for a minute, though it was not once in a hundred absences that he was required; but the question sounded business-like, and he asked it regularly.

The answer was just what he expected—in the negative; but it came in so dreary a tone that Jared stared.

The reason was plain enough: Mrs Jared had caught his despondent complaint, and was rocking the baby over the fire as she counted up the holes that the expected cheque was to stop in connection with unpleasant demands for money, which she would have to answer meekly and with promises. The tears rose to her eyes as she thought of it all—tears reflected the next moment in those of Patty.

“What would they say if they knew all?” groaned Jared to himself as he saw the tears. But he felt that he must stave it off a little

longer, as he planted a child on either knee so as to have something to do, and then declared himself to be ravenous for want of food.

Poor Patty finished her preparations. . She brought out the scrap of cold mutton, and took up the potatoes and plain boiled rice-pudding, but her merry smile was gone. She too had her troubles, and it took but little to upset her. As she caught sight of her mother's sad face, she had hard work to keep her own tears back; for the chill that seemed to have come upon their home had struck to her heart, schooled as it had lately been to trouble.

CHAPTER IX.

EXPECTANCY.

IT was a bitter day without, and now it seemed as cold within. The very fire in the bright little grate appeared to have turned duller, and the air more chill. As to the cold scraps of mutton, they were perfectly icy, and the fat flew off in chips and splinters. A cloud had settled down upon the house, so that there were even great tears round the potato-dish. As to piercing the cloud, all Jared's efforts were in vain, for as fast as he tried to shine in a warm and genial manner to disperse this oppressive mist of adversity, he encountered one of Mrs Jared's looks, which he interpreted to be suspicious—doubtful; and, one way and another, the meal was cold, not merely to a degree, but to many.

There was no work to do that afternoon; no musical cripples to doctor orthopædically; no cracked instruments to solder, putty, or wax-end; no bellows to mend, hammers to

refit, or false notes to tune in accordion or concertina. Trade was at a standstill, and Jared wondered how he should get through the afternoon till the hour when he had appointed Ichabod to meet him at the church for a last long evening practice at the old organ.

But the dinner was hardly over before the postman came by. Jared knew his legs as they passed the area grating, and ran up-stairs to see if he were coming there. For a wonder, he was, and as may be supposed, he left a letter.

Strange hand, and yet familiar. It must be from the vicar. But no ; it was not his hand, Jared knew that too well to be mistaken, and his fingers involuntarily felt in his breast-pocket for the missive which contained the key—a missive that he had of late told himself he ought to have taken to a good solicitor for advice, instead of quietly sitting down beneath the slur.

But perhaps, under the circumstances, the vicar had felt disposed to let some one else write to him. It must be the cheque ; there could not be a doubt about it. No one else would write to him unless—unless——

Jared's brow grew moist, as, in the ignorance of such matters, he stood trembling with the letter in his hand. Might not the vicar have taken legal proceedings, and sent him a summons, now that his time had expired?

That was a dreadful thought, and embraced innumerable horrors—the felon's dock, police-van, cells, convicts, servitude, and worse, infinitely worse than all—a starving wife and children. Jared had a hard fight to recover his composure before going down again to the kitchen, where he tore open the letter.

Mr M'Briar, the landlord, had sent his compliments, and a reminder, that though the rent for the quarter ending at Christmas would be due in a few days, that for the quarter ending at Michaelmas had not yet been paid.

Jared doubled the letter again very carefully, so as to hit the right folds, replaced it in the envelope, and handed it to his wife, who had the pleasure of taking it out and reading it, when Jared saw a tear fall upon the paper, and make a huge blot, turning the sheet of a darker colour as it soaked in.

Tears breed tears, and two bright drops sprang to Patty's eyes as she thought of her own sorrows, of the troubles overhanging the Brownjohn Street house, and the way in which poor Janet was suffering. Then came thoughts of Harry Clayton ; at times soft tender thoughts, at times those of indignation ; and she told herself that he could not love her, or he would never have been ashamed to own her before his friends.

Did she love him ? She asked herself the question, and replied to it with burning cheeks that she thought she did ;—no, she was sure that she loved him very, very much. Oh ! how gladly would the poor girl have gone up-stairs, and thrown herself upon her bed, to have a long, long, girlish cry.

"Would not Richard lend you a few sovereigns?" said Mrs Jared to her husband in a whisper.

"No, no ; don't, please," cried Jared, in a supplicating voice. "Anything but that." For in an instant he had conjured up the figure of his angry brother, and his disgrace. That brother calling him villain, thief, and scoundrel ; upbraiding him once more for

bringing disgrace upon the name so honoured amongst the money-changers of the great temple of commerce. "You know how I have asked him before, and what has been his reply. I can't do it again. But there!" he said, in as cheerful a tone as he could command, "don't fidget; things will come right. They always do, if you give them time enough; only we are such a hurried race of beings, and we get worse now there are steam-engines and telegraphs to work for us."

To have seen Jared then, it might have been supposed that he was in the best of spirits, for he began to hum scraps of airs, beginning with "Pergolesi," and ending with "Jim Crow."

Having no work of his own, he attended to the fire, to clear away its dulness; but he never well succeeded, for the coals were small, and the stock very low.

Then he nursed the baby for ten minutes; in short, he tried every possible plan to raise the bitter temperature of the place. "Let it come in its own good time," he muttered; "there's no occasion for them to meet the trouble half way."

Six different times, though, was Jared at that window, watching, with beating heart, figures dimly seen through the grating bars—figures which had slackened pace, or stopped, as if about to call. Once Jared turned with a deceptive smile, declaring that an old gentleman had passed, so like the vicar that he was not even sure that it was not he gone by in mistake.

“Nonsense!” said Mrs Jared, sadly, rejecting the comfort intended for her. And no one called at Jared’s house, while he felt that it would be impossible for him to ask for the money. Had he been differently circumstanced, he would have refused it altogether; but with a wife and large family, debts, and no regular income, it would have been madness.

Once he had decided that he would tell all, and be out of his miserable state of suspense; but the next minute, with a shiver, he had again put off the disclosure, and moodily began to think over the treatment he had received where he had asked counsel and advice, the hot blood rising to his cheeks as he recalled the manner in which the behaviour of his child had been interpreted.

Five o'clock, and no vicar, no money; and Jared to some extent rejoiced, for he dreaded the vicar's coming, lest the reason of his leaving should be mentioned. And now he brightened up with the thought that it might be possible to conceal the true cause of his leaving the church from those at home, for, instead of looking there for advice and comfort, he shivered with dread lest it should come to their ears. As to Purkis, and the Ruggleses, he would move—go somewhere where he was not known, and where his friends could not find him, making what excuse he could.

"Business could not be worse," muttered Jared to himself; and then he turned to the social meal, resting his hand for a moment upon the head of Patty, who was deepening the hue of her cheeks by making toast, half sitting, half reclining upon the little patch-work hearthrug, in an attitude which bespoke strait-waistcoats and padded rooms for any artists who might have seen her. For, if Patty's face was not beautiful, the same could not be said of her figure, wrapped by the fire in a rich warm glow, which caressed the

smooth long braids of her rich brown hair, and flashed again from her eyes. And all this ready to be Harry Clayton's for the asking. Well might Patty sigh that there was no Harry there to ask.

"There 's some one now," cried Jared, excitedly, as the scraping of feet was heard upon the bars of the grating, and then a foot-step stopped at the door, followed directly by a heavy knock which reverberated through the little house. "Here, Patty, show a light."

But before Patty could get half way up the kitchen-stairs, she heard the front door opened, and a gruff voice exclaimed—

"For Mr Morrison, and wait for an answer."

"Next door," said Jared, in a disappointed tone.

"Why don't you get yer numbers painted over again, then?" grunted the voice, which seemed to consider an apology as a work of supererogation. "Who's to tell eights from nines, I should like to know?"

"No message for any one of the name of Pellet, eh?" said Jared.

The visitor muttered something inaudible, and then came the noise of a heavy thump on the door of the next house, when Jared sighed, closed his own door, and turned to meet Patty.

“I would not have that man’s unpleasant disposition for a trifle, my child, that I would not,” said Jared; and then he descended to find his wife in tears, Patty trying hard the while to keep her own back; and, do what he could, Jared Pellet, organist of St Runwald’s, could not pull out a stop that should produce a cheerful strain where all seemed sadness and woe.

The tea was fragrant, though weak; the toast just brown enough without being burned; while the children ate bread and dripping, just as if—Mrs Jared said—it grew upon the hedges.

But the social meal was now unsocial to a degree. Mrs Pellet hardly spoke, while Jared drank his tea mechanically—three cups—and would have gone on pouring it down for any length of time, if a reference to the Dutch clock had not shown the time to be a quarter to six.

Jared hurriedly rose, to keep his appointment at the church, and prepared to start.

“If—if,” he said, “the vicar, or a messenger, should come, don’t let him in, but send him to me at the church.”

CHAPTER X.

IN THE CHURCH.

OUT into the keen night air went Jared Pellet; but as soon as he was outside his own door, his heart seemed to sink down, heavy, heavier, heaviest, for he was going for his last practice. The old church was to peal with chords from his hands for the very last time; and, filled with bitterness, he strode on, thinking of the day of his triumph, when, in preference to so many, he was chosen organist; of the bright visions of prosperity he had then conjured up, all now faded away, leaving nothing but desolation. There had been a heavy fall of snow, and the streets were hushed and still, even the wheels of the few vehicles seemed muffled.

He shivered with the cold, and at the silence, which seemed oppressive. There were few people about, and though, as he saw them coming, the sight was welcome, Jared Pellet shrank away lest they might

divine his misery. He could hardly believe in such sorrow as now seemed his lot; while he was ready to utter maledictions upon the head of his brother, who heeded them not, but upon whom he laid the blame of making him flinch from telling his wife and daughter the whole story. Was he not now a suspected thief—a beggar? and should he not soon be looked upon at home as a hypocrite and deceiver? Well might he, in his abstraction, be hustled and jostled by those he met, for at times his gait was almost that of a drunken man.

Six o'clock was striking as he reached St Runwald's, but there was no Ichabod waiting, neither was he overing the little fat tombstone that had sunk so far into the earth, nor making snowballs in the path; so Jared kicked the snow from his boots, unlocked the great door, walked in, and, in an absent fit, locked himself into the great gloomy church. Not that it mattered, for Ichabod Gunnis had forgotten the practice, and at this time, in company with three or four birds of a feather, he was lying in ambush in a cour at a little distance, whence he could throw

snowballs at the drivers and conductors of the various 'buses.

So Jared Pellet told himself that it was for the last time that he was standing in the gloomy edifice ; and rapping his teeth with the key, he slowly made his way to the organ-loft, where, after five minutes' fumbling, he found his match-box, and lit the single candle by which he practised, abstaining from touching the blower's dip, till such time as that functionary should arrive.

And there sat, with bended head, the desolate man, the centre of a halo of light, which dimly displayed his music, the reflector, and the keys and stops. Above him towered the huge, gilt pipes ; while from every corner looked down the carved cherubim, here and there one with a flush of light upon its swollen cheeks. The building was very dark, for the light from street lamp or shop shone but faintly through the windows. The snow from without sent in a ghastly glimmer, sufficient to show the black beams and rafters high up in the open roof, where dust and cobwebs ruled supreme. The tall aisle pillars stood in two ghostly

rows; while upon the funereal hatchments between, lay here and there a streak of light, shot through some coloured pane, to lend a bar sinister never intended by the heraldic painter. Now it was the tablet-supported napkin, draped over a carved angel, that caught the light, and stood out strangely from the surrounding darkness, while all below was black, deep, and impenetrable—a sea of shadows, with pew-like waves and a holland-covered pulpit and reading-desk for vessels, to stand out dimly from the surrounding gloom.

Patchy and ill diffused was the light; as if tired and worn with its efforts to struggle through the wire-protected, stained-glass windows, it rested where it fell, to peer down grimly upon the darkness in the nave.

Four times over, eight times over, times uncounted, had the chimes rung out the quarters, and stroke by stroke the hours were told, vibrating heavily through the church, and still Jared sat in the organ-loft in his old position. He was alone, for no Ichabod had come to rattle the handle and

kick the big oaken door. But Jared thought not of cold or gloom, for his soul was dead within him as he mourned, in the sadness of his heart, for the poverty and misery which clung to him, and his inability to ward them off. He could tell himself that he had struggled manfully, hiding his sorrows from those who were dear to him; but now he felt that he was beaten, conquered—that the hard fight had gone against him, and that he must give up.

But where had that money gone? Who had taken it? Had they still watched and tried to find the thief, or rested satisfied with their discovery? He knew not, though strenuous efforts had been made by more than one; but, excepting in a single case, the money marked and left in the boxes had not been taken—a fact which vicar and churchwarden interpreted to mean that the guilty party was found. They had now therefore ceased watching, believing that the treasure was no longer interfered with; though had they once more examined the money, they would have found that two marked half-crowns and a florin had been extracted, as if the thief

had seized his last chance of appropriating a portion of the little store.

“What will become of me? Where are we to go?” muttered Jared; and then he wrung his hands, and pressed them to his aching head. “And if they prosecute, what then?”

Jared Pellet shivered as he asked himself the question, while in fancy he could see reflected in the mirror before him every horror with which for days past he had been torturing himself, beginning with the bar of a police court, and ending with masked convicts in prison yards, toiling at some bitter task, and, like him, dreaming—dreams within dreams—of wives and children shivering at a workhouse door. He knew that he was making the worst of it, but he excused himself upon the plea that it was the first time that he had done so, and that never until now had he given up, for he was very miserable, and he again wrung his hands until the bones cracked.

“What—what shall I do?” groaned the wretched man. “The cheque will not come now; and if they should have sent to arrest me now upon this last day!” And then again

in that reflector he conjured up before him the summons at his own door, the eager step of Patty, expecting a messenger from the vicar, and then the poor girl's horror to find the police were upon her father's track. He could see it all plainly enough in that old mirror, and he covered his face with his hands, and groaned again—"What shall I do? What shall I do?" in a helpless, childish fashion.

"Curse God and die," seemed hissed in his ears; and Jared started and roused himself. He had read and heard of men being tempted into rebellion against their Maker; he had known of those who, in their despair, had been seized by some horrible impulse which had led them to rush headlong into the presence of the Judge—men rich in this world's goods, high in the opinion of their fellows—men to whom high honours had been awarded in the temple of fame,—and yet unaccountably attacked by that dread horror which so often tempts the wretched prisoner to shorten the term of his punishment. Might not this be akin? Was not this some temptation? Oh! that wandering imagination—

that too faithful mirror ! Jared shuddered as in it he pictured more than one fearful termination of his career, and saw his wretched wife upon her knees beside something—something against which he closed his eyes, and upon whose horrors he dared not gaze.

Yes, this was some such temptation ; but he was a man who could defy it ; and starting forward, he seized two or three stops on either side of the instrument, and dragged them out, before running his fingers rapidly along the keys ; but the next instant he paused and shuddered, for in place of the organ's swelling tones came the low dull rattling-bone-like sound of the keys, to rise and fall and go floating through the silent nave of the old church in a strangely weird, dumb cadence.

He gazed before him into his mirror, but it was a black depth, which gave but one reflection—his own ghastly face. Again he leaned forward and swept his fingers over the keys, as if engaged in playing one of his favourite voluntaries ; but he ran through only a few lines, for the low soft rattle again floated through the church, and then he

shuddered as he drew back his hands, for the scrap of candle in the sconce fell through, darting up one sharp blue flame, by whose rays the keys of the instrument seemed to grin at him like the teeth of some huge monster. Then all was silence and gloom, suited to his morbid imaginings, and the visions seemed to float before him once more in the mirror—old dreams—new dreams—old dreams with fresh incidents—dreams of his brother, mocking and jeering at his poverty, and in his prosperity ever crushing him down—dreams of misery—dreams of happiness, wooing and wedding, and joy-bells clashing out jubilant and merry—dreams—dreams—dreams pictured in the depths of that old mirror, and then darkness—a blank.

Cold and shuddering, he started up, for it seemed that a cold breath of air passed across his brow ; then he was listening to a noise as of a closing door ; then there was the soft pat as of footsteps—a rustling—the creak of a pew-door turning upon its hinges ; and slowly turning his head, Jared Pellet sat with dilated eyes, there in the darkness and silence of the old church—listening.

CHAPTER XI.

“WAS IT GHOSTLY?”

“WAS it ghostly—was it spiritual?” Jared Pellet asked himself; as he sat with strained nerves eager to catch the slightest sound. But now all was silent, and he listened in vain. Cold, almost numbed, he rubbed his hands together and left his place slowly, descending into the body of the church, confused as one just awakening from a state of torpor. Once he halted upon the stairs for a minute or two and listened; but he heard nothing, and continued his descent, telling himself that his imagination was wild and overstrained. Then pausing suddenly upon the matting which covered the nave, his heart’s pulsation seemed checked, for from the direction of the north door came all at once, loud and distinct in the empty church, a sharp metallic click; and then, at short intervals three more sounds, each clear and

sharp in the silence, as of money falling upon money.

At any other time Jared would have ridiculed as absurd the idea of being alarmed by supernatural visitations: the church at midnight was the same place to him, but for its darkness, as the church at midday; but now, broken, unnerved, and trembling in every limb, he stood by the south door as if fixed, listening eagerly.

For a while there was silence, so that he could hear his own heart beat, and he tried to make out what all this could mean. Was it—could it be—some strange influence of the mind caused by constantly dwelling upon the abstraction of the poor-box money? or had he really heard the chinking of falling coin? He was beginning to think, from the silence that reigned, that it was all a delusion. He strained his eyes in the direction, but they could not penetrate the thick darkness, and at last a bitter smile crossed his features, as he thought that his mind was becoming disturbed with trouble, and that while he was yet able, he had better seek home and try to rest. Should he walk across the church to

the other door and see if there was anything? Pooh! it was but fancy—a rat, perhaps, under the flooring of the old pews.

Jared felt in his pocket for the key of the door, but it had slipped through into the lining. His hands were numbed with the cold, and he could not extricate it, for the wards were entangled with the rags.

But *that* was not fancy, *that* was no stretch of the imagination. There was a faint rustling noise, similar to that which he had heard at first, and now, apparently, coming towards him.

Jared Pellet was probably as bold as most men of his condition; but now, freshly awakened, as it were, from a strange stupor, in a dark church, at probably midnight, his blood seemed to freeze, and his teeth chattered with horror. What did it mean? What could it be—that invisible thing, that softly rustling noise, coming nearer and nearer? He could not even see the pew by his side. Should he go? The door was locked, and he could not get the key from his pocket; and besides, in the horror of that moment, he had stretched out his hands to keep off

that something strange and rustling that came nearer and nearer, till he fancied that he could hear breathing, and then the rustling ceased, to be succeeded by a low dull beat, which he knew directly after to be that of his own heart.

But at last, as with a flash, a ray of light crossed his mind, which chased away all superstitious fancies. Here now, almost within his reach, was the robber of the poor-boxes returning from his unholy errand. The click he had heard was that of falling money; and the blood flushed to his face as he felt that now was the time for action—now was the moment which should decide his fate. How he longed for a light. The night before had been clear and moonlit, so that he could have seen distinctly; but from the snow-clouds, the darkness was intense. What should he do?

“Whoever it is shall not pass out of the church while I have life,” he thought, as he smiled at his superstitious folly. But, for all that, as he stood there, with arms outstretched in the intense darkness, his heart still beat violently. Whoever it was had evidently

taken the alarm, and was listening intently. But now came once more the rustling, accompanied by a sound that Jared made out to be that of a hand drawn along the sides of the pews.

Closer, closer—he could hear the breathing distinctly; but again there was a halt, during which Jared remained motionless, till the rustling began again, and a hand touched his own.

All the blood in his body seemed to rush to his heart as he felt the contact of that icy hand; the superstitious dread came back; but he threw himself forward, nerved, as it were, by despair, and clutched an arm, but only to be dashed violently back, trip over a hassock, and strike his head a sickening blow against one of the stone steps of the font.

That fall drove out the last dread of a supernatural visitation, and, springing up, Jared gave chase to the rustling figure, which he now heard half way down the south aisle.

It was slow work in the dark, but Jared pushed on, now striking violently against

some pew-door, now stopping half confused in the dark as to where he was ; but there was the rustling noise in front, and as well as he could he followed up one aisle and down the nave, then along the other aisle, but apparently losing ground. The flying one was as corporeal as himself, that was plain enough, for more than once there was the noise of collision with open pew-doors, which banged to and then flew open again, ready for him to strike against violently.

Twice had pursuer and pursued made the circuit of the church, when, feeling that he had neared the flying figure, Jared sprang forward to grasp—nothing, for the noise suddenly ceased. He stopped to listen, but the only sound he could detect was the beating of his own heart.

This was unexpected. He listened again ; no sound. He ran his hand along by the sides of the pews, first here and then there ; he went forward, panting heavily the while ; he came back, but he was still at fault. The quarry had doubled somehow, and escaped him for the time, and would perhaps reach one of the doors ; and in dread of

losing his opportunity, Jared ran hastily towards the south door, but only to recollect that there were the north, west, and chancel doors, through any one of which the fugitive might escape while he guarded the south. Then it struck him where he had been at fault : the enemy of his peace must have crept softly into an open pew and allowed him to pass. That was it, no doubt ; and hurrying back, he was in time to hear the rustling noise very softly at the end of the north aisle, as though his enemy were stealing away. Swiftly as the darkness would allow he hurried on, and once more the chase began. They had passed round the church again, and Jared felt that he was gaining ground, when he caught his foot in the matting where it had slightly turned up, and fell heavily, to gather himself up again just in time to feel once more the rush of cold air upon his cheek, and hear the door locked just as he came up.

Jared's hands trembled with agitation as he tore at his pocket to free the key, dragging out the lining ; and then, as he held the cold iron in his hand, he could hardly find the

hole, so that quite a minute had elapsed before he had dragged the heavy door open, stood amongst the drifted snow in the porch, and taken up the pursuit.

There, in the faint glimmering light, were the deep impressions of footsteps to the church gates, and Jared grimly smiled as he muttered to himself, "A heavy step for a ghost;" but no sooner was he outside the gate than his power of tracking his enemy was gone, for the snow was trampled with footprints crossing and re-crossing, while, though he looked up and down the street, there was nothing to be seen but the glimmering lamps, nor to be heard but the sighing of the cold night wind.

Suddenly he fancied that in the distance he saw a figure crossing the road, and dashed after it as hard as he could run. It turned down a street that he knew well, and, by taking a short cut, Jared felt that he should meet his enemy, if it was the object of his chase; so running down first one street and then another, he neared the bottom outlet of the place he sought, paused a moment to listen, and then could make out the dull dead-

ened sound of coming steps in the snow, apparently nearing him slowly.

To dart round the corner, and grasp the new-comer, was the work of an instant, but it only resulted in his being grasped in return, for the organist was in the hands of the police.

"What time is it?" queried Jared, in a confused manner, as soon as he could open his lips.

"Time you was in bed, *I* think," said the policeman; and Jared shrank beneath his suspicious looks.

CHAPTER XII.

ANOTHER MISSING.

"ONE o'clock, mum," said Mr James Chawner, cordwainer, and member of the society of Campanological Brothers, commonly known by the *soubriquet* of Beaky Jem, tenor in St Runwald's peal. "One o'clock, mum; it's better nor 'arf past. But if you and Miss here is so wery oneasy, I'll get one of my mates to rouse up and search the place; that is, if *you* like," thereby clearly indicating that he—Beaky Jem of the Roman nose—did not much approve of the task.

"It is so very strange," said Mrs Jared; "he left here to go to the church, and he must be there."

"Why, bless your 'art, mum, he ain't been there, or we must have heerd him in the belfry."

"You 've been there all the evening then?" said Mrs Jared.

"Ah! that we have, mum—'leven of us,

practising for Chrismus. We pulled grand-sire caters, 'sire tribbles, and s'perlative s'prise major. Never had a finer night, nor more beer up in my time."

"But could you have heard the organ up in the belfry?" said Patty, who had been escorted home by Monsieur Canau quite late in the evening from the shadowed house in Decadia.

"Heard it! bless your 'art, yes, Miss, a rooring away sometimes loud enough to put yer out, and drown the one that leads and cries 'go,' when we makes the change, you know. That there organ ain't blowed a note, nor there ain't been no light in the church this side o' eight o'clock. And besides, I seed the pleece a kickin' and a cuffin' of young Leathers for shyin' snowballs at the busties."

"Who?" exclaimed Mrs Jared and Patty in a breath.

"Young Charity, mum, young Ikey Gunnis. Howsomever, if it's a coming to who'll go, I'll go, you know; but I'm afeard most of our chaps is about tight—just a little sunny, you know," he added by way of explanation, "for the beer did run free to-night, and no mistake—and I hardly know who else to get, without

it's a pleeceman, and they're so precious 'ficious. You see, people's abed now; and I should ha' been there myself if the young missus hadn't come and roused me out. I was asleep aside the kitchen-fire when she come, for there was a sight o' beer up the belfry to-night sewerly."

"I still think that he must have gone to the vicar's," said Patty to her mother. "I knocked as loudly as I could at the church door, and there seemed to be no one there."

"Perhaps, after all, we had better wait another half-hour," said Mrs Jared.

"Let me go with Mr Chawner," said Patty, eagerly. "The Purkises may have come back now, and they would not mind giving us the keys. I dare say Mr Purkis would go with us, late as it is. He would have gone with me before, I am sure, had he been at home."

"I don't like disturbing people so late; but it makes me very uneasy. Do you think the little ones would be quiet while we both went?"

The suggestion now offered by Beaky Jem, that the governor might be "a bit on," was, when interpreted, scouted with indignation;

and it was at last determined that Patty should stay, while Mrs Jared and Beaky Jem went to Purkis's for the keys, and then searched the church, with or without the beadle's aid.

"Which he won't turn out of his warm bed, bless you," said Mr Chawner ; "he's too"——

He did not finish his sentence, for as Mrs Jared, bonneted and shawled, stood with the others in the passage, there came a buzz of voices at the front door, and, directly after, a gentle double knock.

"There's something wrong, Patty," gasped Mrs Jared, holding her hand to her side, while the one apostrophised admitted Mr Timson, the vicar, and Purkis the beadle, all very muffled and snowy.

"Something struck me that you wouldn't be in bed," began Mr Timson ; but he was stopped by the vicar, who brushed by him just in time to catch Mrs Jared as she was staggering to fall.

"Is—is he dead ?" she gasped, recovering herself by a strong effort."

"Who ? who ?" exclaimed the vicar.

"My husband," panted Mrs Jared.

"God forbid!" ejaculated the vicar, piously; "no, where is he?"

"He went out before six to the church, and he has not been back," cried Patty, in agitated tones. "They were going now to search for him. Here—here he is!" she cried, as Jared made his appearance, pale and scared-looking, while Patty flung her arms round his neck.

"There, there, there! shut the door," cried Timson, hastily; "it's all right, it's all right! And now, what do you want here, you sir? You're one of the bell-ringers, ain't you?"

"Right you are, sir," said Beaky Jem, staring with all his eyes.

"Just so—just so. And now you're not wanted, are you? No one wants you—eh? There then, take that, and be off."

Mr Chawner took "that," and went off—"that" wearing very much the appearance of a warm half-crown from Mr Timson's pocket.

But before Mr Chawner was outside the door, he was muttering, "I knowed he was a bit on; but there was a sight o' beer up our way to-night, sewerly."

"We should have been here hours ago,"

said the vicar, "but the train was stopped by the snow."

"And he wouldn't have come on till the morning, if it hadn't been for me," broke in Mr Timson.

"Let me speak, Timson—let me speak," exclaimed the vicar.

"I won't, I'm —— blessed if I do," exclaimed Timson, excitedly, altering the run of his sentence. "It was my doing, and Purkis's here; and you know I made you come on to-night."

The temperature was bitter, but upon Mr Purkis being referred to, he grunted as he stood behind the door busily wiping the perspiration from his head and neck.

"I won't give up to nobody," exclaimed Timson, pushing past one and then another into the little parlour, so that he might get to Jared.

"There, sir,—there, Mr Pellet! It's all right, sir!—it's all jolly, sir; and there's my hand,—there it is. There's both of them, sir, and hang the grammar. Shake hands, sir,—shake hands! There's four honest hands together, and God bless you, sir!" and old

Timson shook the tears into Jared's eyes, while his own brimmed over from a different cause. "Now you may talk to him, sir," said Timson, who, to further relieve his feelings, caught Patty in his arms and kissed her three times,—once on each cheek, and once upon her lips.

"I only meant one, my dear, but they were so good," cried Timson, who seemed half mad, for he now shouted, "Hooray!" and tossed up his hat, kicking it, as it fell, right into the window, to the total destruction of the cracked pane of glass, with the dab of putty in the centre.

"I say, 'Amen!' to my eccentric friend Timson's remark, Mr Pellet," exclaimed the vicar, seizing the disengaged hands, and shaking them warmly. "Mr Pellet, sir, you have been an ill-used man, and I beg your pardon. The sinner is found. God bless you, Mr Pellet! I hope you forgive me."

"O Mr Gray, sir! how could you suspect me?" cried Jared.

"Weakness, sir, weakness. I am but an erring man. We all err; and but for my

faithful old friend Purkis, I should have gone on erring."

Mr Purkis grunted again, and continued dabbing himself.

"He set me right," continued the vicar, still shaking at the organist's hands.

"And me," broke in Timson. "I helped, to put him right. But there's my hand, Mr Pellet—there it is, sir, and I'm glad to shake hands with you once more. I always wanted to; but I kept my hands to myself on principle, sir. But I always said it wasn't you—I told him so, sir, scores of times, but he wouldn't believe me."

"O Timson, Timson!" said the vicar, reprovingly; "you know that you were one of the first to suspect him."

"Well, how could I help it, when it looked so suspicious?" cried the churchwarden, fiercely. "Don't get putting it all on my shoulders, John Gray—don't, please."

"Shake hands, Timson—shake hands; and let's say fervently, 'Thank God, it is all found out at last.'"

"So we will," said Timson, "so we will; but really, you know," he said, "if I had

given my honest opinion—honest opinion you know,” and his eyes twinkled,—“ I should have declared that it was that old rogue of a beadle of ours in the corner.”

Mr Purkis ceased his dabbling, and stared.

“ But we could not afford to lose so great an ornament to our church, eh ? Mr Gray, sir, eh ? ” he chuckled ; and, by that time, Mr Purkis saw through the joke, and chuckled too, though he had at first thought it rather a serious matter.

Jared was too agitated and too unnerved with the proceedings of the past few hours to do more than shake hands again and again with his visitors. He wanted to tell them of his adventure at the church, but he could not speak ; and besides, there were Mrs Jared and Patty looking perfectly astounded as they tried to interpret the meaning of the scene.

“ There, there, there ! ” exclaimed the vicar, kindly, “ It is late, and they want to be alone, Timson. Let us go, for you are such a boisterous youth. Let them be, Timson, and come away. But tell me first that you forgive me for my injustice, Mr Pellet.”

"Forgive you, sir!" said Jared, in a choking voice.

"There, there!" said the vicar, shaking hands again. "What does it all mean, Mrs Pellet? What! don't you know? More reason for us to go. Come away, Timson, come away. There! you'll wake the children," he exclaimed, as a wail came from upstairs. "Come away, and let Mr Pellet set the heart of his wife at rest. That's right, Purkis, go first. We should not have been so late; but I was in the country when these two came down after me; and then the snow stopped us."

"And he said it was too late to come on to-night," cried Timson, again; "but I would have my way. There's my hand, Mr Pellet, sir. There it is, and—there, I never felt happier in my life." And to prove it, Timson made a charge at Patty, who escaped him, however, by running up to quiet the children, who were like skittles, and upsetting one another till there was quite a chorus.

"God bless all here!" said the vicar, fervently, by way of benediction, as he stood in the passage; and then they would have de-

parted, but for Timson, who turned back to shake hands once more with Jared, exclaiming—

“There’s my hand, Mr Pellet, sir : I always declared it wasn’t you.”

And again, as Jared stood at the door, watching the two down the street, Timson turned again to shout,—“I always said it wasn’t ;” while the gentle, reproving voice of the old vicar was heard to ejaculate—

“Oh, Timson !”

CHAPTER XIII.

AN ACCIDENT.

“No news,” day after day—day after day, till Harry was weary of repeating the words to the troubled father. Sergeant Falkner came often enough to repeat his story, that so far he had done everything possible; but that he had scent of something which he felt sure must turn out right.

At last Harry was wandering one evening towards Decadia, he knew not why, he said, but it always appeared to him as if elucidation of the mystery must come from that direction; and though he would not own to it, he made this surmise his excuse for going often to Brownjohn Street, seeing Janet but seldom—Canau often—quite an intimacy having arisen between the latter and himself.

Harry wandered thoughtfully on, till, nearing the end of St Martin’s Lane, he started back, for from out of a busy street there came a sharp rattling of wheels, a shout,

a dull heavy sound ; then the customary rush of sight-seers till a crowd had collected.

“ There, that’s the seccun’ acciden’ I’ve seen at that there corner with my own blessed eyes,” said a man. “ Them cabs comes cutting along fierce, never thinking as they’ve got anything to do but shout, and everybody’s to get out o’ the way in a instan’. If its panels as scratches, they pulls up ; but if its human flesh and blood, drive on. It ought to be put a stop to—that it ought.”

There was a chorus of indignant acquiescent growls, though no one said what ought to be stopped ; and Harry Clayton pressed forward through the swaying crowd, in the midst of which the shiny crown of a policeman’s hat was to be seen.

“ Get a stretcher—Take him to the hospital—Poor creature !” exclaimed various voices ; and then came a score of indignant commands : “ Give him air !—Stand back, will yer !”—the speakers never seeing the necessity of themselves moving.

“ Why don’t you look alive, and take him to the hospital !” exclaimed a strident voice again.

"Non—non ! chez moi—chez moi !" groaned the sufferer.

"What's he say ? He's foreign ! Any one here understand Dutch ? Anybody know who he is ?"

"I do," said Harry, pushing forward. "He wishes to be taken home," just as, half insensible, the sufferer babbled a few words in his native tongue, to which he seemed naturally to revert ; and then, under the young man's guidance, poor Canau was borne to his lodgings, and a surgeon procured—one who came the more willingly upon Harry furnishing him with his address, and undertaking, if necessary, to defray all expense.

"I did try to get away ; but I was confused, and stumbled ; and ah ! ma belle patrie !" muttered Canau, "I shall see thee no more."

For the surgeon had made his examination, bandaged, and done all that was possible to ease the sufferer, and then taken his departure.

"I am hurt—much hurt," said Canau, feebly, as he reached out a withered hand to Harry ; "but I should like just once"—

He turned his eyes towards a violin hung upon the wall ; but when Janet eagerly reached

it down, and Canau tried to raise the bow, his bruised muscles refused to act, and he shook his head.

“Had you not better try and sleep?” said Harry to the injured man, who seemed momentarily to grow more feverish and excited.

“Sleep!” he exclaimed, hoarsely, “sleep now? Shall I not soon sleep without waking? No, no—no, no! Look here! you are a gentleman—you have feelings. Listen! Years ago—many now—I fled from my country. I was sought for; I was called ‘traitor!’ But why? *mon Dieu*, why? Because I loved my rightful monarch, and would have seen him on the throne. But might is right, even as you say it here; and I fled to beggary and wretchedness amongst these poor—I, a gentleman—to drink at last to drown my misery, till I tried to live by my violin, and then I took to that poor child, saved her from misery and death, and now she loves me.”

Worn out at last, and half delirious with the fever from the injuries he had received, the Frenchman at last dozed off, when Harry rose to leave, wondering whether, after all, Canau knew what had become of

Lionel, and hopeful that, if he did, his prostrate and weak state would offer opportunities for arriving at the truth.

As Harry reached the bottom, D. Wragg, pipe in hand, made his appearance, craning his neck, and thrusting his face forward in disagreeable proximity to that of his visitor, as in answer to Harry's "Good night," he exclaimed—

"I know!"

"Know what," said Harry, sharply, his thoughts instantly reverting to Lionel, and the hope that if D. Wragg knew anything, now in his state of semi-intoxication, he might divulge some clue to the mystery that had troubled them for so long. But if D. Wragg possessed a secret, it seemed to be one from which he felt in no haste to part; for, with drunken solemnity, he merely shook his head a great many times, and then drew back softly into his shop, closing the door after him; but only to open it again a few inches, so as to allow the passage of his head as he muttered gruffly, throwing the words, as it were, at his visitor—

"Never mind!"

CHAPTER XIV.

A QUESTION.

"BEEN here five minutes, sir," said Sergeant Falkner, as Harry Clayton entered the passage of the Regent Street house. "Yes, five minutes exactly," he continued, referring to his watch. "I'd allowed myself ten minutes to wait and see if Sir Richard woke up; and if he had not at the end of that time, I was off. But as you've come, sir, that'll do as well, for I promised him I'd look in and state progress every day."

"What news have you, then?" said Harry.

"I don't know as I have any as yet, sir."

Harry gave a fresh gesture of impatience.

"Slow and sure, sir, 's my motto," said the sergeant. "Tain't always that one can make a dead swoop down. I should have liked to have brought you word that I had found next day after getting instructions; but a case of this sort is like hatching chickens—it takes time. You've been thinking as the eggs are

all addled, but p'raps you're wrong, sir. I don't know. I won't say but what I might have heard one little thing beginning to peck inside, and one may have a good brood yet—who knows!"

"But have you anything authentic you can tell me?" said Harry, who was wearied out with these many purposeless visits, the endless consultations, the trivial information demanded, and after all the small result.

"Nothing, sir, as yet. Only I tell you this, I think I shall have something for you directly."

"Hope deferred," said Harry, bitterly.

"Maketh the heart sick—eh, sir? Exactly so, and good news is the physic as makes it well again. Have a little more patience with me, and you may be satisfied yet."

Harry bent his head.

"Look here, sir," said the sergeant; "just another word before I go. You've been very often to Decadia lately."

"Yes," said Harry.

"Well, sir, if you'll take my advice, you won't go there so often. Why not? you think. My answer to that is—We haven't

found your friend yet ; and my experience of some parts of London is, that there are men in it who think a deal more of a pound or two than they do of a man's life."

Here Sergeant Falkner fixed a bold clear eye upon that of the young man for a few seconds, nodded sagely, and then departed.

Left alone, Harry stood thoughtful and half startled for a few minutes before going up to Sir Francis' room, where the baronet still remained sleeping, evidently under the influence of some sedative, for there was a graduated bottle upon the little table by the head of his couch, and a faint odour that reminded Harry of visits to a photographer's pervaded the room.

"Must be ether!" he said, softly, as he went on tip-toe to the bedside, and anxiously looked down on the pallid troubled face, whose expression—even in sleep—told of the tortured mind, and the pangs which the old man was called upon to suffer.

"Let him sleep," said Harry to himself, and he stole gently from the room to sit and think for a while, when, the hour being far too early for bed, he lit a cigar, and went out for

half-an-hour's stroll before retiring for the night.

"I wonder whether we shall ever see him again?" thought Harry, as he turned down one of the quiet streets, intending to make a circuit and return to the chambers by another route. His thoughts were busy now,—he was running over in a half-troubled way the words of the sergeant that night, for they had left their impression; then he felt disheartened and sad, as he thought of Patty's intimacy with the Decadia people, and the way in which she was dragged into the affair, trembling, too, as it struck him that there might be legal inquiry, and she called upon to give evidence. At last he came to the conclusion that he would go and boldly beg of Jared Pellet to keep her away from the wretched district, and quickened his steps as if about to go at once, till he recollected the hour, and once more slackened his pace.

The street was perfectly empty, the lines of lamps looking in the distance like a vista of golden beads hung in the air.

Suddenly he was aroused from his musings, and, turning sharply, he was face to face with,

and so close as to be even touching, his follower, who, with one arm upraised, was about to seize him by the neck, the gaslight falling full upon the features of Mr John Screwby.

Mr John Screwby had indeed been about to administer the garotter's hug, for he had followed Harry through the frequented streets till he had turned into one that was retired, and afforded an opportunity that this gentleman did not feel disposed to resist.

Times had been what he termed "hardish" lately. Buoyed up by the hope of obtaining the reward, he had fallen into the habit, while hope lasted, of boasting among his companions of the luck about to fall to his share. That luck, though, had never been his; and the failure of several little adventures had also tended to lower Mr Screwby's banking account. Hence, then, he had been on the look out for an unconsidered trifle or two.

The opportunity was excellent—the hour was late. A glance up and down the street had shown him that there was not a soul in sight, while as to the houses, for the most part the lights were now in the upper stories.

Mr John Screwby's teeth glistened brightly, and with rapid action he stepped forward, at the same time softly turning up his cuffs as if to strike.

It was a chance and no mistake, he thought. Nothing could have happened better—cash, a watch and chain, and a bit of revenge, all at one swoop. For if it had not been for this swell, the old gentleman would have written his cheque for the reward, and it would have been cashed, and there would have been an end of it.

A quarter—one half of the street had been traversed, and Screwby told himself that it was time to close. He gave another glance behind him—all right. If he had only had a mate now, how easy the job would have been. But then a mate would have wanted half the proceeds, and there might have been a row afterwards, and a split, so that it was better so.

Hunting—sporting of any kind—pooh ! what could they be to such sport as this—so exciting, and dashed with a tinge of danger ? And then the game was so profitable !

Mr Screwby licked his lips as, with head

down and hands held in true pedestrian fashion, he pressed on.

Now was the time, he felt. He had closed to within a yard—a dash in and it would be done—the arm thrown round the victim's neck, a sharp twist, a kick at his legs, and he would be down upon the pavement, which would effectually stun him. Then a little rapid manipulation, and all would be right.

“Now for it, then!” he resolutely exclaimed, and he raised his arm.

Is there, or is there not, some instinct of coming danger—some strange, ethereal, electric wire of sympathy, along which, as rapidly as thought, speeds the warning “Look out!” What do psychologists say? Some are for, some against the possibility of such influences: take, then, your own experience and judge. See how often, as if feeling the *wind* of the coming peril, people have been known to swerve aside, or halt, or hurry on, or stay away scores of times, and escape. Instances innumerable might be cited of where the preyer has been balked of his quarry, even as here, when, just as Screwby was in the act of making his spring, Harry turned

and faced his enemy, and both stood for a brief minute without moving.

The next moment Screwby drew back to gather force, then, with fingers crooked like a beast's talons, he leaped at Harry's throat, but only to receive full upon that flat and ugly nose a tremendous blow sent right from a desperate man's shoulder.

In itself the stroke seemed hard enough to have made the organ flat; but, joined to it, there was the force with which Screwby was making at his destined prey—the two forces added forming a total whose result was a dull, unpleasant-sounding thud—a heavy, drunken stagger—and then Mr John Screwby seemed to collapse, his legs doubling beneath him, his whole body assuming a wavy motion, and he was upon the pavement in a curious heap, emitting as he went down a groan that sounded as if the collapse were total.

"Ullo! what's up now?" greeted Harry's ears, as he stood binding a handkerchief around his bleeding knuckles, and gazing at his fallen assailant.

Harry turned to find that a policeman had made his appearance.

“ This man attacked me, and I struck him down,” replied Harry.

“ Then you must come on, and enter the charge,” said the constable. “ Now, then rouse up here,” he continued, giving Mr Screwby a shake which made his bull head tap the pavement in a most unpleasant manner, till in a confused fashion he rose to his knees, and then stood up, staring hard at the proximate area railings, as if he were in doubt as to where he was, and evidently took the iron bars for those of a very different place. A moment later, though, he saw more clearly his position, and, thrusting the constable back, he darted off, and would have escaped, but for the appearance of another officer from round the corner—the shouts of his fellow galvanising him into activity.

Then there was a rush, a struggle, and the rending off of buttons, the loud bang of a heavy hat falling upon the pavement, and but for the coming up of Harry and the other constable, Mr Screwby would once more have been on the way to his den. The reinforcements, though, prevailed, and the next

instant the ruffian was prone upon his back, and swearing powerfully.

This time the ignominious bracelets of the ill-doer were produced, and a sharp "click, click" told that they were ornamenting the wrists for which they were destined.

"I'd put a pair round his legs if I had my will," growled the first constable. "What d'yer mean by falling in that ere way?"

The man took a great cotton handkerchief from his hat, and with it mopped his head hard, for he was tightly buttoned up in his coarse, heavy greatcoat.

"Yer might ha' known you'd ha' been ketched without coming these games," he growled again, taking it as a deep offence against his own dignity that the culprit had tried to escape after being "took."

But Mr Screwby did not condescend to reply with words. His responses were all looks, and those of a class that the second constable, who had found a dent in his hat, stigmatised as "gallows;" but whether deserving of that appellation or no, they were sufficiently evil, heightened as they were by a stained countenance and eyes swollen suffi-

ciently to startle any one who met their gaze.

Mr John Screwby was caught and handcuffed, but he was not caged; but lay upon the pavement sullen and heavy, refusing to hearken to the voice of the charmer when requested to rise; even a playful tap or two from a staff, and a sharp twist of the handcuffs had no effect; the result being that one constable had to seek the station for more help, and Mr Screwby rode off in triumph, his chariot being a stretcher, and the pæan of praise the mutterings and growlings of the perspiring police.

It was too late for there to be much of a popular gathering; such as there was, though, was decidedly of a sympathetic cast. Fortunately the station was near at hand, in which place of security Harry saw his assailant safely lodged, and then sought his temporary home, wondering the while whether a similar attack had caused the disappearance of Lionel Redgrave, and also whether the man was taken who could bring the affair to light.

CHAPTER XV.

"COMING EVENTS."

THE morning dawned before Harry Clayton fell asleep. After an early walk, he met Sir Richard at breakfast, to find him pale, but calm and composed.

It was very evident to the young man that the father was losing hope, and that he was having a hard struggle to resign himself to what had fallen to his lot. Two months had now elapsed, and not the faintest trace of a clue by which Lionel could be traced had been found.

"I have been thinking, Clayton," said Sir Francis, as they sat over their meal, that it would be cruel and unjust on my part to retain you here any longer. You have your career mapped out, and every day that I keep you is to your injury."

"Never mind that, Sir Francis," said Harry. "I am as deeply interested in the search as yourself, and I cannot give up hope

so easily. When I feel despair creeping upon me I will give up—not before. But you are better this morning?”

“More resigned, Clayton—more resigned,” said the old man, sadly. “It is time to try and bear it.”

Harry reminded him that the sergeant was still hopeful, and also told him of the man’s last words; but Sir Francis only shook his head sadly. He grew more interested, though, when Harry related his adventures of the past night, and also laid bare a few of his thoughts; but they seemed to make no lasting impression; and soon after, leaving the room, Harry made his way anxiously to the police court, for the feeling grew stronger that he had at last run the villain to earth—this man whom he had recognised on the previous night as the informer, and also as the low-browed scoundrel who had watched them at the bird-dealer’s.

Might not this be poor Lionel’s destroyer? It was mere suspicion, but might he not have committed some foul deed, with Lionel Redgrave for victim, even as he had essayed on the previous night, for it was by the narrow-

est shade that he had himself escaped. Poor Lionel was perhaps caught in one of the vile purlieus of Decadia, and had been dragged away and hidden after being plundered; while to divert suspicion, with extra cunning—where no suspicion existed—this scoundrel had essayed to lay the blame upon the house of Wragg.

Suspicious these, certainly; but as Harry walked on, from being shadowy they gradually grew more solid and firm, so that he eagerly waited at the court the turn of Mr John Screwby, whose vile countenance, when placed in the dock, wore anything but an improved aspect, with the addition of a damaged nose and a pair of hideously discoloured eyes.

The case was plain enough as far as the attempt was concerned. Suspicion of other matters, of course, could not be raised. But there were several little ugly facts brought forward respecting Mr John Screwby's character—touching six months' imprisonment for this, three months' imprisonment for that, a year for something else,—altogether a total of four years for different offences that the

warders of different prisons could declare to. Consequently, as Mr Screwby's name stank in the nostrils of the law, he was remanded, with the certain prospect of being committed for trial at the next hearing.

Weary and unsettled, Harry strolled down the next evening to Decadia. The first face he encountered was that of D. Wragg, who was seated behind his counter with the shutters up, and the gas turned down very low.

"Oh, yes! you can go up," said the little man, gloomily; "but don't you make no mistake, and think I ain't so sharp as I should be, because I've seemed a bit queer lately. It was all through a drop o' drink, and I shouldn't ha' taken that if it hadn't been along o' that friend o' yours. Cuss him! what did he want to go losing dorgs for, and come here bringing mis'ry into a pore man's home?"

D. Wragg ended his speech almost with a whine, wiping away two or three maudlin drink-begotten tears; when, seeing from the man's state that it would be of little avail to remind him of the cause of Lionel's first visit,

Harry ascended to find Canau sitting up in bed, holding one of Janet's hands in his.

"Aha!" he said, softly; "then you have come again. What news of your friend? None? Aha! I suspect D. Wragg once, and he trapped me like one of his pigeons; but there—he is innocent; he has no secrets but about wretched dogs. He is not bad, but he is little—little at heart. He has no soul for a great crime. He hides away dogs in holes and cupboards and corners, and we hear mysterious cries, and think them dreadful, here in this house, and the good Madame Vink faints away. Then I go looking—to find what? Ma foi! dogs—dogs—dogs. Nothing more. There was nothing to find."

"Are you an arch-traitor?" thought Harry for a moment, as he sat gazing at the injured man. "If your heart could be laid bare, would it disclose anything?" The sad calm look upon the little Frenchman's face disarmed him, though, the next instant, and he felt half angry at the flash of suspicion, as Canau continued—

"We have strange ideas all of us; and we all suspect one another. I have often think

D. Wragg knows where your poor foolish friend has gone, and he think the same of me; and the work-people outside say it is a judgment on me that I am struck down, and that it will save me from what they call 'scragg.' But no, no! I shall not be hung at Vieux Bailee. But they are *sots*—fools all."

Harry sat by the bed half-disposed to tell of Screwby's attack, but he refrained.

"Monsieur," said Canau, after a pause, "I think I shall be the better for this hurt. It has made me think of how I have let myself drift—drift away, when I ought to have fought, and been something better. There is only one thing that I have kept of the past, when I was another man, and that is my music. Janet, my child, when I am well, we will go from here and live otherwise: I have not been just to you. But D. Wragg has been good to me, and a friend when I was in despair with life; still I must change. Yes, we will go and live away from this wretched place. Pah! how could I have kept you here so long? Only let me get well, for I shall not die of this hurt. I wish that you too were glad and happy as I feel.

Poor Janet, too, would be glad of heart did she know that your friend was found, and the old man his father at peace."

Janet listened eagerly as Harry spoke of the inutility of their search, and then the poor girl shrank back; but attention was drawn from her by a sharp cry of pain from Canau.

"Shall I fetch a doctor?" said Harry earnestly.

"No, no; I shall be better—well directly. The pain is sometimes sharp. But ah, bah! it is nothing. I shall live—I shall be well soon. I do not trouble myself at all. But hark! Mon Dieu! listen! Is there fresh trouble in the house? They will not search again—I cannot have it! Monsieur, I am weak."

Harry, as he started up, gazed curiously at the injured man, for there was a strange dread in his tones that again raised suspicion. But there was evidently something important on the wing. Amidst a good deal of noise, there arose the sound of voices in loud altercation; and as he opened the door D. Wragg could easily be heard as he exclaimed—

"Don't you make no mistake now; I'm

not going to have my place searched again ; so now, then !”

“ Ah-h-h ! Ma foi ! ” ejaculated Canau, and a spasm sent its trace across his features, while Janet, wild-eyed and strained, held tightly by his hand.

“ There is something coming now ! ” thought Harry, and his heart beat painfully as D. Wragg’s voice was again heard.

“ Yes ; he is here ! And if he is here, what o’ that ? Don’t you make no mistake. There ain’t no harm in his coming here if he likes, is there ? No one ain’t a-going to burke him. I’ll fetch him down, for I ain’t going to have no more searchings in my house.”

“ Searching ! Ah ! I cannot bear it ! ” groaned the Frenchman.

Directly after there was the thump, thump, of D. Wragg’s heavy boot on the stairs.

“ ’Tis for me,” said Harry, turning to Canau. “ There seems to be news ; ” and then, with a feeling of compassion, he continued, “ but do you know anything of it all ?—speak if you do.”

“ I know ! No, no ; not a word ! ” ex-

claimed Canau, when, waiting to hear no more, Harry hurried excitedly to the door, to encounter Sergeant Falkner, while closely following him came D. Wragg, growling viciously, and tearing at his spikey hair, as he set his boot down violently upon each stair, as if crushing under it vermin in the shape of the police.

A few words, though, from the sergeant had the effect of setting D. Wragg off into a set of terpsichorean evolutions that were grotesque in the extreme. Certainly a triumphal dance was intended, with accompanying stamps of the thick boot and snappings of his fingers; but how he could possibly have contrived to jerk, and start, and jig as he did, and yet live, was a puzzle that brought down the far-famed Gordian knot into a contemptible cat's-cradle of Berlin wool. Dislocation! It might have been thought that he was out of joint from head to toe, and india-rubber had taken the place of his muscles.

"I told you so—I told you so!" he shouted. "There! don't you make no more mistakes, any on you, because—Hip—hip—hip—hooray! I say, though, Mr Canau, ain't it

glorious? But I say, sir, Mr Clayton, sir, is there any little thing in the shop? Don't you make——there! ain't I glad!"

Another triumphal dance succeeded D. Wragg's burst of eloquence, when he stumped off, sowing turnips as he went, to find Mrs Winks; while Harry hurried back into the room to whisper one word—a word which made the Frenchman fall back upon his pillow with a sigh of content, as Janet turned to the window to hide her face from those who were too much engrossed with their own thoughts to think of the poor girl's feelings.

"I am content now, Monsieur Clayton," sighed Canau. "There will be no more suspicion, and you will come and see me when I am a different man. But I could not bear that there should be a slur upon the place where we have lived so long. But there! go—you are anxious;" and as Harry hurried from the room, Canau repeated, with brightening eye, that most important word which Harry had uttered, and that word was—

"Found!"

CHAPTER XVI.

MR PURKIS DOES HIS DOOTY.

MR PURKIS stood in his shop carefully cutting out strips of white paper for the measurement of future customers' feet, when he heard the pattering of feet, and anticipating trade for the establishment, he raised his eyes, slowly, and with due importance.

"What's this, Mr Purkis, sir?" cried the visitor, rushing into the shop with a violence that made the little bell give tongue furiously—so furiously that it seemed as if disposed to compete with little Tim Ruggles, excited and hot as he was with running. "What does all this mean, sir? How is it—when was it—and how did it happen? I must know—must, indeed."

Mr Purkis stood erect, with his hands beneath his black linen apron, and puffed out and collapsed his cheeks again and again, but without answering his visitor.

"I must know, Mr Purkis, sir," cried Tim

again, as he took off his hat, put it on, and walked about the shop in his excitement. "I've been to Mr Pellet's, sir, and he won't tell me a word, so I've come to you."

"Well, you see, Mr Ruggles," said Purkis, slowly, as if he sold his speech by the yard like shoe-string, after puffing and gasping three or four times like a fat old tench,—“you see——”

"Don't say a word, Joseph—don't commit yourself," exclaimed Mrs Purkis, coming forth in a great hurry from the back regions, and busily rolling her arms up in her apron as she came, perhaps to hide their red and chappy state—perhaps from modesty or for comfort.

Mr Purkis looked at his wife, and then again at restless Tim, gave a gasp or two, puffed out his cheeks beadle-wise, and then opened his mouth as if to speak, but no words came.

"Don't say a word—don't say anything about it!" exclaimed Mrs Purkis again in a great state of excitement, but unrolling one arm to place it through her husband's, as if for protection, as she looked defiantly at Tim.

"You know what the pleece said to the boy when he took him up for stealing the list-slippers. What you say now 'll be used in evidence agen you ! You 're mixed up enough with it as it is."

"Oh ! please don't stop him," cried Tim Ruggles, in agony, as he wrung his hands and looked imploringly from one to the other. "What does it mean ?"

"Well you see, Mr Ruggles," said Purkis, after another tenchy gasp.

"Now, Joseph, don't," cried Mrs Purkis.

"Hold your tongue, woman," cried Mr Purkis, majestically—the beadle asserting itself over the husband.

"Don't stop him ; pray don't stop him, Mrs Purkis, ma'am," cried Tim. "What does it mean ? Mrs Pellet began to tell me, when Mr Pellet stopped her ; and now Mr Purkis begins to tell me, and you stop him."

Mrs Purkis shook her head fiercely, so that something, probably curl papers—for she was strong in crackers—rattled.

"Please tell me," implored Tim. "It's about that robbery at the church ; and Mrs Pellet says that you, sir, saw Mrs Ruggles at

the boxes, and then Mr Pellet wouldn't let her say another word."

"And so I did see her," gasped Mr Purkis, rattling his halfpence as he spoke; "kiss the book and take my Bible oath I did"——

"Now, Joseph—now, Joseph," cried Mrs Purkis, interrupting him; "don't say another word, or you 'll never forgive yourself."

"Hold your tongue, woman!" cried Mr Purkis again, more importantly, but without looking down at her, or taking his hands from where he had deeply thrust them—into his pockets.

"Don't speak to me in that rough way before people, Joseph!" cried Mrs Purkis, indignantly, and she gave the arm to which she clung a sharp shake.

"Be quiet, then," said Mr Purkis, importantly, and then he gave two or three more puffs out to his cheeks. "You see, Mr Ruggles," he continued, "I've a great feeling of esteem for Mr Pellet, who is a fine musician, and not a better in London. It was through him, sir, that Mrs Ruggles got that there appointment of pew-opener, for if it

hadn't been for Mr Pellet, sir, *I* shouldn't have stirred in the matter."

"O Joseph!" whimpered Mrs Purkis, "I thought you would. You're a committing yourself, and laying yourself open."

"Be quiet, woman!" roared Purkis, looking his beadlest.

There was only Joseph Purkis of the boot and shoe emporium, in his black linen apron and shirt-sleeves, list-slippers, and, like a chain of office, a few slips of measuring paper over his shoulders, while he certainly had not been shaved for two or three days, and was consequently very stubbly; yet you could see a cocked-hat with broad gold lace in the pose of his large hair-streaked head; there was the broad red velvet and gold cape spreading over his shoulders, and his ponderous gilt mace of office seemed to recline in the hollow of his arm as he spoke. There was a majestic look about the man which told of habitual command, and he showed it in the way in which he crushed his wife with a side look.

"Mr Ruggles, you see, I felt hurt to see Mr Pellet in trouble, and losing his organist-

ship on account of that poor-box being robbed, for I knew as he was going, being p'raps the only man as did ; and it troubled me, sir, dreadful, being plundered again and again ; and more than once I was that uncomfortable about it that I could have sent in my uniform to Mr Timson, sir, which would have shown as I meant to resign ; only I knew as my enemy the greengrocer would have took the post, and worn that hat in triumph—too big for him though it was—sizes—and padded with brown paper. So I wouldn't send it in, sir, though an independent man, and able to live on my business."

"O Joseph, Joseph !" whimpered his wife, "this'll all be used in evidence ; and you don't know as the income-tax people ain't listening, and you never paid a penny yet."

"Hush-sh-sh !" ejaculated Mr Purkis, as if he were in the loft amongst the whispering boys of Gunnis' gift of charity, and removing one hand from his pocket, he seized a lady's slipper, and slapped the counter with the sole ; while poor Tim Ruggles stood wringing his hands, and looking appealingly from one to the other.

"You see, Mr Ruggles," said Purkis, waving the shoe, "having the cleaning and polishing of those poor-boxes, I felt as if I was answerable for them, and as if it was me as ought to know where the money went. They weren't my tills, sir, but they was in my church; and the people as that there money was for was my poor people, as I've presided over in the giving of scores of doles at the vestry—people as respex me, sir; and, after a deal of consideration, I says to myself, I says—It's some one as goes to the church on week days, and it's either me"——

"O Joseph, Joseph!" cried Mrs Purkis, beginning to sob.

"Why can't you be quiet, and let a man speak?" exclaimed Mr Purkis, in injured tones.

"But—but—you'll be getting yourself into trouble about it," sobbed Mrs Purkis. "Please don't let him say no more, Mr Ruggles."

"Women is so soft, Mr Ruggles," said Purkis, benevolently.

"Not always, sir—not always," said Tim,
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standing first upon one leg, then upon the other, and rubbing the nap off his shabby hat till there was quite a bald place. "Not always, sir; I've known them as was very hard."

"So have I, sir," said Mr Purkis, importantly, as a county magistrate pronouncing a sentence,—“so have I, sir; and I says to myself—Joseph Purkis, you've been parish officer at St Runnle's a many years now, and with that there stain about the church, your uniform is a getting tarnished, and your superiors will look down upon you till you clear it away. Them boxes are in your charge, and therefore you owe a dooty to yourself to set all right. He didn't look at you at all last Sunday, the vicar didn't; and how do you know but what he suspects you, same as he may any innercent person? He may even now think as you have a hand in it, and be writing out your resignation for you. And really, Joseph Purkis, I says, it looks as if it were either you”——

“O Joseph—Joseph!” sobbed Mrs Purkis.

“Be quiet, woman, can't you?” shouted

Purkis. "Either you," he continued, slapping the counter with the shoe, "or some one else familiar with the place."

"Oh!" gasped Mrs Purkis.

"Now, just you go in there, and shut that door after you, Mrs Purkis, if you please," said the beadle, more importantly than ever; and, taking his other hand from his pocket, he opened the parlour door as if it had been a pew, and made way with a flourish of the shoe for his wife to enter; while that lady, whose society had now become too demonstrative to be pleasant, raised her hands appealingly to the Wellingtons hung around the shop, as if to ask them to bear witness that it was in spite of her advice Mr Purkis persisted in committing himself. But the next minute she was invisible, on account of the dingy muslin blind over the half glass-door, and Mr Purkis walked back Astur-like in his stately stride.

"So, Mr Ruggles," he said, "speaking as a man to a man, I felt it to be my dooty, for the benefit of all parties concerned, to watch, sir; and I did watch, sir, night after night, sir, day after day, sir; and where do you

think I was, sir? Why, high up, sir, in the pulpit, with the door jest ajar, and a few cushions, to make the place a bit easy. Ah! sir, I've seen Mr Jared Pellet and Ichabod Gunnis come, sir, and go; and often, when that dog of a boy has come by himself a waiting for the organist, I've been at my wits' ends, sir, to see that there young dog a sliding down the bannisters of the gallery, or a swinging on the pew-doors, and my fingers have itched to that degree, sir, to get hold of my cane, that I ain't been hardly able to bear it. It's been orful, sir, sometimes—orful to see the wicked young villin! What do you think of a boy getting into the reading-desk, and beginning, 'Dearly beloved brethren,' and then going down to the clerk's desk and singing 'Amen,' just like our old man? Why, sir, one night I felt a'most ready to bust with indignation when he came down first, with Mr Pellet stopping up in the loft to think, I s'pose. What do you think the young dog did, sir? Why, he took the kiver off the font, sir, and then if he didn't go and commit sacrilege, and defame and disgrace the beautiful old stone thing by climbing up

and standing upon his head, sir, in the font, and kicking his heels together, and playing up the what's-his-name's delight.

“ Ah ! he's a bad un, that boy. What do you think he did another night, sir ? Put me in a cold perspiration he did, and then made me rise up with that big pulpit-cushion in my two hands. I should have heaved it and knocked him over like a skittle ; only I knew it would not only upset him but all my plans as well ; so I sat down again and filled my mouth full of pocket-handkerchief to stop back the indignation, for my pot was hot with thorns. What was he a doing of, sir ? Why, I'll tell you. A dog ! he'd got both his shoes off, and one in each hand, a walking all over the church backards and forrards and zig-gery-zaggery, balancing hisself like a monkey the while. Not very wrong that you'll think, Mr Ruggles ; but he was doing of it all on the narrow tops of the pews ; and hang me, sir, if he didn't try to jump across the middle aisle, only he came down flop on his back, and got up whimpering, and limped out of the church as hard as he could go. Then, I've seen Mr——what, sir ? ”

"Pray put me out of my misery," implored poor Tim.

"I'm a coming to it fast, sir," said Purkis. "I've seen Mr Pellet come down and stop by the poor-box on the side where the door was open, and sigh bitterly, and go away again; and though I've watched a deal that way, I couldn't see nothing wrong out of the pulpit; so, to the utter neglect of Purkis's boot and shoe emporium, and to the constant annoyance of Mrs Purkis, which said it was no business of mine, I kep' on the watching, for I never give way, sir, in anything—not a peg. Why, sir, I'm a lion to that woman, sir; and as long as I'm a lion, why she's a lamb; but if I was to stop being a lion, sir, it's my belief she'd grow into a fierce tiger-cat, sir, and I should only be a mouse. Never give way to a woman, sir; they're made on purpose to be ruled; and if you don't rule 'em, sir, why, they'll know as there's something wrong, and they'll rule you.

"Well, sir, I took to t'other side then, and used to sit in the reading-desk; and there I never saw anything but aggravation. Young Ichabod playing pitch-and-nickem with but-

tons and nickers in the middle aisle, or turning summersets over the hassocks ; and once, I declare solemnly, I could hardly bear it, for if he didn't get my mace, sir, and begin by walking up and down, and making believe it was me ; then he must get to balancing it on his chin till he let it go agen one of the lamp glasses and cracked it, and I'll crack him for it now the thing's found out, with the very cane too as he took and stole out of mischief. But the worst of all was when he took and put that there staff across a couple of the free-seats, and began taking races and jumps over it, just as if he was in a playground instead of the Holy Catholic Church. Why, sir, it was enough to make the stone images on the monnyments tumble on him and crush him into the pavement—a bad dog !

“ Then I tried the galleries ; but I found out nothing there ; and at last I took to the churchwarden's pew, for I was determined to keep it up ; though I must own, sir, as a man as always speaks the truth—for the truth may be blamed but can never be shamed—and as one who may soon be on his oath, but who respex you, and is sorry for you, Mr Rug-

gles—that I should have found it out sooner if it hadn't been for the church being that bitter of a night that I was obliged to take a drop of something to keep the cold out of me for fear it might affect me so as to make me sneeze just at the most partickler time."

"Please, sir, do—oh! do go on," cried Tim, imploringly.

"Yes, yes! I'm going on," said Purkis, solemnly. "So, sir, more than once I'm afraid I went to sleep in the big pew, same as I did on the night when I woke up and felt horribly frightened at hearing a something rattling about in the middle of the church; and for a time, sir, waking up fresh out of a long dream where I'd been heading a procession of thieves and poor-boxes, and policemen on the way to the Clerkenwell Police Court, I thought it had been something of what my old Scotch friend Sergeant Pike used to call 'no canny.' But there, sir, I soon shook that off, and rising very gently, I peeped over the edge of the pew, and I could just make out some one going along the middle aisle, and I knew the step as well as could be, besides a crackling staybone-and-busky

noise as the figure made every time it stooped, while it never turned to the right or left without going altogether as if the neck was stiff."

"Then it was a figure?" said Tim, wringing his hands.

"Oh yes, sir, it was a figure," said Purkis, waving the slipper more and more; "a stiff figure, as went softly to first one and then the other poor-box; and I heard a key go and money chink after the figure had been well round the church. It sounded just like Mrs Purkis emptying out the till on Saturday nights."

"But pray"—— exclaimed Tim.

"Don't interrupt, sir! Hush!" exclaimed Purkis pompously, as if he were frowning down a pack of boys, and making the chattering young dogs shake in their leather breeches; while gazing mournfully at him, as if he knew all now, Tim Ruggles, with his face full of wrinkles, waited to hear more.

"I knew the step, sir," said Purkis, "and I could see the figure turn all round at once, sir, without moving its head; and then, in my lair, I watched and watched with my heart beating fierce, for I knew that the time

was come for me to vindicate innocence, and to—to—er—er——wait Mr Ruggles, sir. And I did wait, Mr Ruggles, sir, till I heard the church door shut softly, when all was so still that I couldn't help thinking it might be fancy."

"And it was fancy, Mr Purkis, wasn't it?" exclaimed Tim, eagerly.

"No, sir, it warn't fancy," said Purkis, austere, as he waved Tim back with the slipper. It was all true as true; and I slapped my knees and rubbed my hands, and then I looked up towards the old organ and nodded at it; for I thought of the vally of what I'd found out, sir, to a good man, and no end of a family of children. And then, when I thought I'd waited long enough not to be seen, I went and knocked up Mr Timson, our churchwarden; fetched him out of bed, for it was one o'clock and past; and when he got down to me in his dressing-gown, he began a bullying me like anything; for he thought, you know, I'd come boxing with my Christmas-piece.

"But, 'gently, sir,' I says; 'don't be rash—don't be hasty.' 'Hasty!' he says: 'I'll

report you to Mr Grey. Get out, sir, you're drunk : I can smell rum here.' 'And a good thing, too,' I says, 'for keeping cold out when you're watching poor-boxes at night in a empty church?' 'What?' he says, 'what did you say, Purkis?' he says. For answer, sir, I laid a finger solemn-like against one side of my nose, and looks at him out of the corners of my eyes. 'Purkis,' he says, 'Purkis : you don't mean as you have found it out?' 'But I do, sir,' I says ; and then I told him all, and he begged my pardon ; and then, if he didn't go into fits of delight, hopping about. 'I always said as it wasn't Pellet,' he kept on saying. Then he danced round the room, with his little bare legs popping out of the bottom of his dressing-gown, and he slapped me on the back over and over again. 'Poor old Pellet!' he says ; 'I'm glad : out and out glad!' Then he called me a trump, which, though it was well meant, didn't sound respectful to a man in my position in life, and beadle of St Runnle's for all the years as I've been.

"But I didn't show no temper, sir, for he meant well, as I said before ; and he gets out

something in an ugly little bottle, as he poured into two of the wretchedest little glasses you ever see ; but when you come to taste it, my ! it was just like what he called it ; ‘gold water,’ he said it was, and he chuckled and danced as he poured it out. ‘Pon my word, sir, it was like swallowing melted sovereigns.”

Tim groaned, but remained patient and motionless.

“Then, sir,” continued Purkis, “I went away a happy man, promising that I’d be with him next morning—no, it wasn’t, though, it was the same morning—to run down with him to see the vicar, as was in the country.

“‘Do you mean to report me, sir?’ I says. ‘Don’t be a fool, Purkis,’ he says. ‘I want you to tell him with your own lips.’

“Tell him what, sir?—tell him what?” said Tim, piteously.

“That I’d seen”——

“Stop—stop!” exclaimed Tim, imploringly, as if, now that it had come to the point, and he was about to have that which he already knew corroborated, he could not bear it. “I

don't think I can quite take it yet ; but there ! —yes—please go on."

"That I'd seen her, sir, as I could swear to, go to the poor-boxes one after another, and take something out, just like Mrs Purkis emptying the till, and then steal off, sir, so still that you could hardly hear her, only for the clicking of the key in the lock, and then she was gone."

"*She* was—*she* was gone?" faltered Tim.

"Yes, sir ; she was. Dark as it was, I could make out all I have said ; and then it puzzled me that we should never have settled it upon her before, when we found the money missing. But, you see, she was always so prim, and clean, and neat, and respectable."

"Always, Mr Purkis, sir," said Tim ; "always."

"And no one never would have thought it of her," said Purkis.

"No, sir ; no one," responded Tim, and then, sinking his voice to a whisper, he looked anxiously round the shop, dropping his hat, and then starting as he caught Purkis by one of his buttons—"Who was it, sir ?—who was it?" he said, in a voice hardly above his breath.

"Why, you don't want me to tell you, I'm sure, sir?" said Purkis, stoutly.

"Oh yes, I do!—oh yes, I do!" groaned Tim.

"Then," said the beadle, "I'll tell you!" When there came the words "O Joseph!" plainly heard from the inner room, pointing to the fact that Mrs Purkis had been listening the whole time. But her lord heeded not the soft appeal, but, leaning forward, he placed a hand upon Tim's shoulder, his lips close to his ear, and whispered the words.

With a cry, the little tailor caught up his hat and dashed out of the shop, then, after silencing the irritated bell, Mr Purkis gave one of his customer-seeking looks up and down the street, but it was only to see poor Tim Ruggles disappear round the corner.

"I knowed you'd commit yourself, Joseph," whimpered Mrs Purkis, standing at the inner door, and rolling her arms tightly in her apron.

"My dear," said Mr Purkis pompously, "it was only my dooty!"

CHAPTER XVII.

JOHN BROWN.

"IT'S all against rule and regulation, and that sort of thing," said the sergeant, as he and Harry Clayton were being jolted over the stones in a Hansom cab; "but ours is a particular case. The old gentleman's there long before this, sir. He seemed to revive like magic as soon as ever I told him the news. He just hid his face for 'a few moments, and then said quite sharp, 'Go and fetch Mr Clayton, and bring him after me,' telling me, of course, where you were gone; and here I am, sir."

"But it seems so strange," said Clayton. "I can't understand it."

"Strange, sir! 'Pon my soul, sir, if you'll excuse me for saying so, I'm quite ashamed of myself. Thought I was up to more than that. And yet, here's all the wind taken out of my sails, and I'm nowhere."

Harry nodded, for he wanted to think, but the sergeant rattled on—

“It’s always the way with your biggest puzzles, sir : the way to find them out is the simplest way—the way that’s so easy that you never even give it a thought if it occurs to you. Perhaps you remember that chap in the story, sir, as wanted to keep a certain dockyment out of the way of the foreign detectives—French police—over the water—secret police, I think they call themselves ; not that there’s one of them who can hold a candle to our fellows. Spies, perhaps, would be the better name for them. Well, he knew that as soon as he was out, they’d search the place from top to bottom. Well, what does he do ? Hide it in the most secret place he could think of ? Not he ; for places that he could think of as being the safest, perhaps they might think of too. He was too foxy, sir ; and he just folds it up like a letter, sticks it in a dirty old envelope, and pops it into the card-rack over the chimney-piece,—plain, for all folk to see ; and, as a matter of course, they never so much as look at it. That’s just been the case with the young squire here ; he’s

been stuck up in the card-rack over the chimney-piece, chock before my eyes, and I've been shutting 'em up close so as not to see him, when he's been as good as asking me to look. There, sir! I haven't patience with myself; and I'm going to ask to be put on the sooperannuation list, along with the pensioners as I call 'em. Mysterious disappearance! why, it wasn't anything of the sort, sir. But here we are!"

The cab was checked as he spoke, and alighting before a great gloomy looking building, the sergeant led the way up a flight of stone steps, and into a hall, where a liveried porter saluted him with a nod.

"Here, bring us the book again, Tomkins," said the sergeant; and the porter reached a large folio from a desk, and placed it before the sergeant upon a side-table.

"Here you are, sir," said the sergeant, eagerly, as he turned back some leaves, till he came to one which bore the date of Lionel's disappearance. "Now, look here!"

He pointed to an entry in the accident register; for they were in the entrance-hall of a large hospital.

"Look at that, sir," said the sergeant again; "and tell me what you think of it."

Harry Clayton bent over the book, and read—

"Brown, John, stableman, run over by a cab. Severe concussion of the brain."

"Now, sir, what do you make of that?"

"Nothing at all," said Clayton, blankly.

"No more did I, sir. I wasn't looking after John Brown, a stableman; but Lionel Redgrave, Esq. But that wasn't all. I've seen this case—I've been to the bedside, and then I didn't think anything of it. I was so clever."

"But does that relate to him?"

"To be sure it does, sir. I tell you it's easy enough, now one can see through it; but I couldn't put that and that together before. Name never struck me a bit, when it ought to have been the very key to it all. He was knocked down, and run over by a cab, when out on his larks. Got his hair cut short, and his mustacher shaved off. There's his clothes too, up-stairs—reg'lar stableman's suit—masquerading things—such togs for a gent like him to wear! Poor chap, it was

a bad case, though, for he was nearly killed. Well, of course, they brought him here, and asked him his name, when, just being able to speak, he says the very last thing that was in his poor head, before the sense was knocked out of it, and all its works were brought to a stand still. 'What's your name?' they says; and as I said before, he answers the very last thing as was in his head before he was stopped short, and that was the name of the place he had been to — Brownjohn Street; and, saying it, no doubt, very feebly, they didn't hear any more than the Brownjohn, so they put him down as Brown, and his Christian name after it, as is their custom, John—Brown, John; and here he's lain insensible to this day. But come on up, sir."

Following an attendant, Harry and the sergeant were ushered into a long, white-washed ward, where, on either side, in their iron bedsteads, lay sufferers from the many accidents constantly occurring in the London streets. Here was a man who had fallen from a scaffold; there one who had had his arm crushed by machinery, and, all around, suffering enough to affect the stoutest heart. The

sergeant, though, had no eye for these, and swiftly leading the way down the centre, he conducted Harry to where, weak, pale, and helpless, on his bed of suffering, lay Lionel Redgrave,—his hair shaven from his temples, and the large surgical bandages about his head adding greatly to the cadaverous expression of his countenance.

There was not the slightest doubt of his having suffered severely—it was written too plainly on his face; but he seemed now to be perfectly sensible, and as Clayton approached, he tried feebly to hold out his hand, whispering as he did so, the one word—

“Harry!”

Sir Francis sat holding the other hand, anxiously watching his son's face, and hardly reassured by the house-surgeon's declaration that, with anything like care, the young man was now out of danger.

“Don't speak to him, Clayton,” said Sir Francis. “Don't talk, my dear boy. Pray remember your condition.”

“All right,” was the reply, but in very feeble tones. “Seems as if I had been to sleep, and only just woke up. Confounded

Hansom!—over me in a moment—Martin's Lane—remember no more.”

“Yes, yes, we know all,” said Sir Francis; “but for my sake now be silent.”

“I must put in a word, too,” said the house-surgeon, approaching. “I think he has borne as much as will be beneficial for one day. I must ask you to leave now. Tomorrow he will be better able to bear a visit.”

“Another ten minutes,” pleaded Sir Francis. “Not one instant more. We will not talk.”

The surgeon bowed his head, when Harry, after warmly pressing the young man's hand—for he somehow felt thoroughly at ease within his own breast—retired with the surgeon and the detective to another part of the ward.

“Curious case this, sir, eh?” said the sergeant.

“Well, yes,” said the surgeon. “But what a strange whim! We had not the most remote idea but that he was some young groom out of place. I judged the latter from the whiteness of his hands, and I must really do our young friend the credit of saying that he thoroughly looked his part.”

"I believe you, sir," said the sergeant, "for I was took in,—as reg'lar as I was ever took in before. But they will do this sort of thing, these young gents, with nothing else upon their hands. I don't wonder at it. Must be a miserable life!"

The last remark was made so seriously, and in such perfect good faith, that the surgeon and Harry Clayton exchanged glances, smiling the while.

"I hope," said the latter, "that he will soon be fit to be removed."

"Well, before long," said the surgeon. "Ten days or so. Not sooner—bad case rather. It was only this morning that he became sensible; and I don't think that even now he fairly realises the length of time that he has been lying there."

"But this must be a most unusual case," said Clayton. "Surely you never had a suspension of the faculties for so long?"

"Oh yes!" said the surgeon. "Such things do happen. Concussion of, or pressure upon the brain from a fracture, gives us at times some exceedingly interesting studies. In this case, the horse must have struck your

friend full on the temple, and I wonder that he was not killed."

Then, according to the custom of his *confrères*, the surgeon proceeded to dilate upon the number of eighths of an inch higher or lower which would have been sufficient for the blow to have caused death. But he was interrupted in his discourse by the approach of Sir Francis, who now came up, watch in hand.

"The ten minutes are at an end, and I thank you, sir," he said. "I am indeed most grateful for your skilful treatment of my son. How can I ever disburden myself of the obligation?"

"Oh! if you come to that, easily enough," laughed the surgeon, who fully believed, and held unflinchingly to the faith, that his hospital was the best in London, sparing no pains to let every one know that it was also one of the poorest. "We don't want such patients as your son here, Sir Francis Redgrave; and you may depend in future upon receiving our yearly report, with, I hope, your name down as one of our donors."

Sir Francis shook hands warmly, saying

nothing, but thinking the more deeply ; and then, bidding farewell to the sergeant at the door, he was accompanied by Clayton back to their temporary home.

They had not been back long though, before there was a step on the stair, and Mr Stiff, the landlord, came up to announce a visitor.

“Who?” said Sir Francis.

“That there little jigging man, sir, as Mr Lionel used to buy his dogs of in”—

“Tell him that I am unwell—that I cannot see him,” exclaimed Sir Francis ; and Mr Stiff took his departure, but only to return at the end of five minutes.

“Well, Mr Stiff?”

“I can’t get rid of him, please, Sir Francis. He says he should be so glad if you’d see him only for a minute. He won’t detain you more, and he’s in a terrible way about your saying you can’t.”

“Well, show him up,” said Sir Francis, who was not in the humour to refuse anything in the gladness and thankfulness which now filled his heart.

“Shall I see him?” said Clayton, offering to relieve Sir Francis of the task.

"No ; perhaps it is something about poor Lionel. I will see him."

The next minute there was the peculiar thumping noise of D. Wragg's feet in the passage, but Sir Francis found time to say a few words before the dealer reached the room.

"Is not this the curious-looking man at the house we searched ?"

"The same," said Harry.

"Ah, yes!—I forgot," said Sir Francis ; "these troubles have tried me. But here he is."

Sir Francis was right, for the noise increased, the door was thrown open, and the next moment, in a tremendous state of excitement, D. Wragg stood confessed.

CHAPTER XVIII.

D. WRAGG ON PRINCIPLE.

"SARVANT, sir—sarvant, sir!" exclaimed D. Wragg, flourishing his hat first at Sir Francis, and then at Harry Clayton, while he worked and jerked himself about in a way that was perfectly frightful to contemplate. "Just give me a minute. I won't keep you both more than that, only I couldn't rest without coming in to tell you as it does us at home so much good 'cos that young gent's found, as you can't tell."

Sir Francis knit his brow as he listened, for he could not help associating the man before him with the cause of Lionel's disappearance; but he did not speak.

"Ah! I see you're cross about it," said D. Wragg, who caught the frown; "but never mind if you are; we're glad all the same. You thought we had to do with it?"

"My good fellow, yes!" exclaimed Sir

Francis, hastily ; for this touched him upon a tender point—he had been unjust. “Yes ; we did think so, and I beg your pardon for it most heartily. It was a gross piece of injustice, and I beg that you will forgive it. If”——

“You’re a reg’lar, thorough-bred, game gentleman ! that’s what you are,” said D. Wragg ; “and I respect you, sir, that I do. And if you’re sorry for having my place searched, why, there’s an end of it ; and as to forgiving you, why, we won’t say any more about that.”

“But if money”—— continued Sir Francis.

“No ; money ain’t got nothing to do with it,” said D. Wragg, gruffly ; “and yet it has too, something. You see, sir, I got hold of Sergeant Falkner, and he’s put me up to it all—how you found the young gent in the orspital and all ; and so I wanted to come on about it. But what did I say to you when you came to me to search my place ? Why, don’t you make no mistake, I says, and now I says it again. Don’t you make no mistake ; I ain’t come after money ; but just to say as

I'm sorry as the young gent should have got into such trouble through coming to my place ; and as to his getting better, all I've got to say now is, as he shan't never come inside the shop again. I did have some of his money for different things ; but there, lor' bless you, I put it to you, Mr Clayton, sir, if I hadn't had it to do me good, wouldn't he have spent it in organ-grinders, or brass bands, or something ? 'Pon my soul, sir, I never see a young gent as knowed so little of what money was worth."

"And do you mean," said Sir Francis, "that if my son gets well, and comes to your place again, you will not admit him ?"

"Course I do. Don't you make no mistake, sir. I'm in real earnest, I am ; and if at any time you want a dorg, or a score o'—— Blow it ! hold your tongue, will you," he said, breaking off short in his speech, this portion of which was born of constant repetition. "But don't you make no mistake, sir—he shan't come no more ; and as to the place being searched, that wasn't your doing ; that was spite, that was, and Mr Jack Screwby—

an ugly cuss ! But they 've got him for 'sault and violence, and he'll get it hot, and no mistake, sir. And now my sarvice to you both, gents, and I 'm off; but I thought I 'd come to say as I was sorry and glad too, and you understands me, I knows."

As he turned to go, Sir Francis crossed the room, and tried to thrust a five-pound note into his hands; but D. Wragg waved him off.

"No, sir; I promised 'em at home, if you wanted to do anything of that kind, as I wouldn't take it—and I won't—so there now. But look here ! don't you make no mistake; I ain't proud, and if you says to me, 'Mr D. Wragg, will you take a glass of wine to drink my son back again to health?'—why, hang me if I don't."

Crash went D. Wragg's hat down upon the floor as he spoke, and after his arms had flown about at all manner of angles with his body, he folded them tightly, and stood gazing from one to the other.

"You shall drink his health, indeed, Mr Wragg," said Sir Francis, smiling; and the decanters being produced, D. Wragg did

drink Lionel's health, and then in another glass that of Sir Francis, then took another to drink Harry Clayton's, and yet one more for the benefit of all absent friends, when he stumped off, evidently wonderfully steadied in his action by what he had imbibed.

CHAPTER XIX.

RICHARD PELLET'S VISITORS.

THE clerk whose duty it was to show visitors into Richard Pellet's private office ought to have been well paid, for he must have been a valuable acquisition to his employer. Doubtless it was the result of training—he was for ever supposing that “the firm” was engaged. It was so when Jared last called. It was so when Harry Clayton determined to try and make friends with the husband of his late mother, and appeared at the office door. And it was so when, an hour after, a plainly-dressed, pale-looking woman asked to see Mr Richard Pellet. But if, the clerk said, she would give her name, he would go and see.

“Ellen Pellet,” was the calm, quiet answer.

“Mrs Ellen Pellet?” queried the clerk.

“Yes,” was the reply.

The man stared, hesitated, went half-way to the inner office, returned, hesitated again,

and then turned to go ; while more than one head was raised from ledger or letter to exchange meaning looks, after a glance at the very unusual kind of visitor to Austin Friars.

"It ain't my business," muttered the clerk to himself, and passing down the little passage, he opened the private office door of the firm, heedless of a light, gliding step behind him, and announced Mrs Ellen Pellet.

"Who?" roared Richard Pellet, leaping from his seat, and glaring at the clerk.

"It is I," said a quiet voice in the doorway, and Richard sank back pale and gasping in his seat.

For the visitor was already in the room.

"Oh yes! Ah, to be sure!" stammered Richard, striving hard to recover himself, with a miserable mask-like smile overspreading his features. "Glad to see you—sit down. That will do, Bailly; I'm engaged if any one should call."

The clerk left the office, and closed the door, walking back to his stool with a prominence in one cheek which drew forth sundry winks from fellow-labourers in Pellet and Company's money-mill. But the door

of Richard Pellet's private office was thick and baize-lined, and no inkling of the scene within reached the ears of the clerks.

No sooner had the door closed upon them, than the smile was driven from Richard's face by a bitter scowl, and rising from his chair, he took two or three strides to where his visitor stood, hissing between his teeth—

“Curse you! what brings you here?”

Such a fierce aspect, accompanied as it was by threatening gestures, would have made many recoil; but Richard's visitor stepped towards him, and caught him by the breast, exclaiming—

“I have been unhappy lately; I could not rest there. I want my child!”

“Curse your child!” cried Richard, in an angry whisper, and then, with a cowardly, back-handed blow, he sent the poor creature staggering against the wall; but her countenance hardly underwent a change, as, starting forward again, she caught him once more by the coat, repeating her words—

“I want my child!”

“How dare you come here?” he exclaimed, in a low, angry voice. “How dare you come

here to disgrace and annoy me? How came you away from—from your lodging that I got for you?"

"I came away—I want my child!" was the only reply.

"There! hush! Don't speak so loud!" said Richard, in an angry whisper, as he glanced uneasily at the door, and stepping to it, slipped into its socket a little brass bolt. "Did I not tell you never to come here? and did you not promise?"

"Yes, yes!" was the hoarse answer; "but I want, I will have, our little one. I have been to the man who had it—I found him out; but he would not give it to me. You have told him not. I could not rest for thinking about it. I want my child, and then we will go far away together."

"Go and seek it where it has gone," said Richard, brutally, almost beside himself with suppressed rage;—"it is dead!"

"It is a lie—a lie!" cried the woman, excitedly, her pale face flushing with anger. "That man told me the same; but he is in your pay, and you have hidden it from me."

She clung to him now fiercely, clutching

the ostentatiously-displayed smoothly-plaited shirt-front, and turning it into a crumpled rag.

"Hush! hush! For God's sake, be still!" he exclaimed. "They will hear you in the outer office. I have not got the child; it died months ago."

"It is a lie!" exclaimed the woman, more angrily. "You drove me mad once with your ill-treatment, but you shall not do it again." Then, raising her voice—"I will have my child!"

As Richard Pellet's face turned of a ghastly muddy hue, he glanced again and again at the door, his hands trembling with the cowardly rage that, under different circumstances, might have made the life of the woman before him—his wife—not worth a moment's purchase. The coarse, heavy, insolent smile was gone; for he was attacked in his weakest point, and already in imagination he could see the side looks and laughter of his clerks, and hear the sneering innuendoes of fellow-men of his own stamp when there was a public *exposé*, and Richard Pellet, the wealthy banker, who for the sake of money had kept

his weak insane wife in obscurity for years, that he might commit bigamy for the fortune of the Widow Clayton, was arraigned for his offence against his country's laws, and the story of his wife's wrongs came forth.

What was he to do? He must get her away quietly—by subterfuge—he could lead her in one way he knew, and she would not believe the truth.

The scandal, after so many years lying hidden, would now most certainly be bruited abroad. Some men would have laughed it to scorn, and faced it with brazen effrontery; but Richard Pellet was a religious man—a patron of philanthropic societies—even now upon his table lay half-a-dozen annual reports with his name thereon as steward or committee-man, for all men to read. Why, his very sober beneficent look carried weight, and he was always placed in the front rank upon the platform at Exeter Hall meetings. In fact, in May, during the meetings, he adopted white cravats and frills. And now, in spite of money, care, secrecy, this matter would be spread abroad. He could hear it already; and to hide this example of his cruel

love of greed, had he dared, and could have hidden the crime, he would have struck down the patient sufferer whom he had treated with such a mingling of cruelty and neglect, dead at his feet, with as little compunction as he had already shown in sending her staggering to the wall.

But the wife of long ago, whose reason had gone astray years before, the soft eyes, the pale face, and trembling lips were here no more; and Richard Pellet, as he shrank from her, felt himself to be almost helpless in the hands of one whose strength was augmented by her position, for he dared not raise his voice. He knew, too, that now the time had gone when he could command, and he must try subterfuge, and get her away abroad, where she would be safely kept. He blamed himself now that he had not placed her in an asylum, but he recalled his reason—it would have been too public a proceeding; and in these fleeting moments the question came, were the gold and position he had won worth the price that he had paid?

As he stood there in her grasp, his mind was made up, and he said quietly, "Sit down."

"No—no—no!" was the hasty reply, as if she dreaded his influence. "I want my child: give me my child, and let me go."

"But, Ellen, this is madness and folly," he whispered. "You know it is not here. He told you that it was dead, did he?"

"Yes," she cried, angrily; "but it was not true. You told him to say so. Where is she now?"

"Look here!" said Richard, writing an address upon a card—that of one of the boarding-houses in the neighbourhood. "Take this and go and wait there till I come, and we will go and see about it. But, for my sake, do not make a disturbance here—it would be ruin to me."

The poor creature, half reft of her senses, gazed earnestly in his face for a few moments, while the angry light faded from her eye. In her tigress-like rage for her lost little one, if met by anger she was ready to dare, urged by her maternal instinct; but these gentle words disarmed her resentment, and falling on her knees at Richard Pellet's feet, she burst into tears, sobbing as she begged of him to let her have her child.

"Yes, yes! you shall; only get up," said Richard. "It shall all be made right, only go now."

"Then you will give her to me?" she said, imploringly. "I will not say a word to any one about being your wife if you will give me my child. I know now why you shut me up there with Mrs Walls. I have thought it out: it was that you might marry some one rich; for I, when my head went, was not fit to be your wife. But I could not help it."

"Well, well; go now," cried Richard, impatiently; "and we will talk about that afterwards."

She rose to her feet slowly, clasping his hand in both her own, and gazing earnestly in his face, as if trying to read his thoughts; and they must have been plain to read, for, as if she saw in his face cruelty, treachery, and a repetition of her long sufferings, she dashed the hand away, and stood defying him once more, the former rage flashing in her eyes as she repeated her demand—"Give me my child!"

"Go and wait for me there, then," said Richard, sullenly.

"I will never leave you till I have my child," she exclaimed.

Again the cruel, malignant look came into his face as Richard Pellet cursed laws, protection, everything that stayed him from crushing out the life that now rose in rebellion against him. He cursed his own hypocrisy, which now fettered him with chains such as stayed him from setting this burden at defiance and casting it off for ever.

"I told you before that she was dead," he now said, throwing himself back in his chair.

"Dead—dead—dead!" echoed his wife, "and I told you it was a lie—a cruel lie—like those you have told me before. But she is not dead. She was too young, too beautiful to die. Why, I tried to die a hundred times there, in that cold, bare room, in the bitter winters, and I could not. She could not die. You have taken her away, and I will not be cheated again. She is not yours, but mine—mine—my very own. Give me my little one!" she cried, raising her voice.

"Here! come with me, then, and you shall have her!" cried Richard, desperately; and snatching up an overcoat, and buttoning it

closely over his breast, he led the way into the outer office. "Back in an hour," he said abruptly; and then, closely followed by his unwelcome visitor, he passed into the street, called the first cab he encountered, and, after giving some instructions to the driver, he motioned to his wife to enter; but she refused until he had set the example, when, following him, she took the opposite seat, and the door was slammed, and the vehicle driven off.

The clerks in the outer office suspended work as soon as the heavy door swung to, and began to give due attention to this strange visit, which was on all sides declared to be "a rum go," when the door again opened, and Harry Clayton entered.

"Mr Pellet returned?" he asked.

"Been at the office again, sir; but he has just gone out with a lady. Said he would be back in an hour."

"I'll wait," said Harry, and he sat for an hour, and then for another, but still Richard did not return, so he left, and slowly sauntered towards London Bridge.

"I don't want to give him the opportunity of saying I avoided him," thought Harry,

and then his thoughts turned towards money matters, and the possibility of Richard being compelled to disgorge a portion of the money that should by rights have been Mrs Clayton's son's—he did not know that it was in his power to make him give up all. Then he began to wonder what sort of a reception he should meet with. The last encounter had been far from cordial, and since his mother's funeral, Harry's letters had been but few and far between.

“I will see him, though,” said Harry, “if I follow him for a week.”

CHAPTER XX.

BEATING THE BARS.

"Now!" exclaimed Richard Pellet, as soon as he and his unwelcome visitor were in the cab, "will you wait patiently, if I take you somewhere, till I can place you where you will see your little one?"

She gazed long and earnestly in his face before answering.

"Will you keep your word?"

"I will!" he said, and she bent her head, when, lowering the front window, Richard gave fresh instructions to the driver, who drew up at the end of a long busy street.

"Where are you taking me?" she asked, suddenly.

"Only where you can stay for a day or two," said he, preparing to get out. "Sit still for a few minutes till I come back."

"But you are going to leave me," she cried, clinging to his arm.

"I tell you I will come back," he exclaimed,

angrily ; and, apparently satisfied, she sank back in her seat.

Five—ten minutes elapsed, but the occupant of the cab did not stir. At the end of another five minutes, Richard returned, panting and out of breath, spoke to the driver again, and once more the cab jangled over the stones and drew up at a half-open door.

Richard sprang up and took tight hold of his companion's arm, but she followed him with alacrity, only starting back as the street-door closed behind her, when she found herself in the presence of Mrs Walls and in her old gaol.

Richard turned to leave, but the cheated woman turned with him, clinging to him tightly, and imploring him not to leave her there in the most piteous manner. He tried to shake her off ; he swung her to and fro ; he loosened one hand, but only for the other to cling to him more tightly, till, enraged by her persistence, and unable to govern the vile passions that she had roused, he struck her heavily with his clenched fist, so that she fell back half stunned and with a thin stream of blood flowing from her lip.

"Why, you great brute—you cowardly ruffian!" exclaimed Mrs Walls, who had some feeling of compassion yet for the suffering member of her sex. "That wasn't bargained for."

"Hold your tongue!" cried Richard, fiercely. "Keep to your engagement, and let her loose this time, and you shall suffer for it, even if I do myself. There is law, recollect, for such as you."

"I'd suffer it for two pins, so as you should be pulled down too," muttered the woman, as she wiped the blood from the prisoner's lips, and then with a scowl Richard turned to go.

"I shall be back in three days at the latest," he said. Then he paid and dismissed the cabman, walked hastily through a few streets, and then took another cab and drove off.

"Gone!" exclaimed Ellen Pellet, opening her eyes to gaze about her in an anxious manner as she tried to make for the door.

Mrs Walls nodded, and then half led, half pushed her into a back parlour.

"He'll be back in two days, and then you're going away from here, and for good,

and I'm glad of it," said the woman, not unkindly, considering that but a day since her prisoner had contrived to escape. "I don't want you here any more."

"To take me to her?"

"To be sure," said Mrs Walls, as she would have spoken to a child. The next minute the door was closed, and the key turned upon the prisoner, who sank down upon a chair, and pressed her hands in a bewildered way to her forehead.

She sat without moving for an hour, and then began to pace round and round the room to find, after trying door and window, that the former was fast and the latter only slid down a few inches at the top, the bottom being of ground-glass, and preventing a view of the outer world unless the occupant of the room stood upon a chair; and even then only the backs of houses and a blackened wall or two were to be seen.

Escape now seemed to be the sole idea in the poor creature's mind. She recalled in a darkened way a long period of imprisonment, and evidently dreaded its recurrence, for again and again she tried the door, shaking

it gently, but it was locked, though the key remained in, so that she could touch the end as it projected about the sixteenth of an inch through the keyhole.

Another hour passed, and another, of torture and dread of treachery.

Could she not get away to her little one? That was the great thought which crushed all others; and as if determining to escape, she began to try with her nails to turn the key, repeating her efforts till the wards hung downward. Then, by means of a wooden splint, one of a dozen upon the chimney-piece, she thrust the key nearly out of the keyhole, where it hung while she listened attentively, then, with one more gentle push, it fell rattling down upon the oilcloth of the passage.

She stood listening, her bosom heaving painfully, but no steps followed the noise—it was evidently not heard, and, sinking upon her knees, she tore up the edge of the tacked-down carpet, till she could pass her worn and bony fingers beneath, and drag it away from the door, leaving the bottom exposed.

There, beneath the door, was the key plainly to be seen, for the light from a stair-

case window fell upon it ; but it was out of reach, and the aperture would not allow the passage of her fingers. She knelt there though, biting her nails for a minute and listening, before taking up the splint that before had been her friend.

She tried to reach the key, passing the splint beneath the door, but it was not long enough. She took another—sane enough now in her desire to escape—and tearing a strip from her handkerchief, bound two splints tightly together, and tried again.

Yes ; they would pass under easily, and she could touch the key and move it. She could hear it glide along the oilcloth for some distance in one direction ; so she tried from the other side, and moved it back.

Forwards and backwards she moved that key a score of times, indefatigable in her efforts ; but it would come no nearer, for there was an inequality over which it would not pass—the floorcloth at that spot was doubled.

Suddenly she stopped, for she heard steps upon the stairs, and Mrs Walls came by, her dress brushing against the key and slightly altering its position. Then once more all

was silent; she had passed by without noticing that it was out of the door, and nothing was heard but the faint sound of the traffic in the street.

The splints again at work—this way, that way, but no sound of grating key upon the oilcloth, and after many trials, the prisoner laid her head upon the floor, and tried to catch sight of the object of her search.

There it was : just the ring visible, but beyond the reach of the splints, for it had been swept along a few inches by the dress. But three splints might do it : so another was tied to the others, and once more the trial was made.

Joy! They touched the key; but they bent and would hardly stir it from the weakness of the wood.

What should she do? How could she get out? Why did she allow herself to be trapped when it seemed to her troubled brain that her little one was calling! But if she stayed, would he let her see her child? Had not he said—had not the tailor said—it was dead. It was a lie—a cruel lie—it could not be dead. They had hidden it away

from her where she was never to see it more.

With these thoughts exciting the crushed and patient sufferer, she paced round and round the room, to pause, at last, to tear at the screws that held the lock to her prison door, and only to leave off with bleeding fingers.

A new thought, and she darted to the window, tore down the red worsted blind-cord, and ran back to the door. Down upon her knees with the stiff cord doubled, and a great loop thrust gently under to try and draw the key towards her.

Now it caught, drew it a little way, let it slip, and came through alone; now it thrust it back when the cord was again pushed through. Another trial, and the cord caught, the key grating over the oilcloth, but only to be checked once more by the double fold and lost.

Disappointment upon disappointment, and a great dread upon her mind that her gaoler would return, find out her attempt to escape, and defeat it by bearing away the key.

Another trial, and another, and another, and once more the key caught against that double in the oilcloth; but now a vigorous snatch and it had fallen over it and close to the door, and though the cord came through without, she could now plainly see the wards of the key—touch them with one of the splints—draw them towards her—touch them with a finger—hold the key in her hand—and be at liberty once more.

Her heart beat with excitement, and then seemed to come to a dead stop, for as she stood where she had leaped to her feet, there came once again the sound of footsteps, now descending, and the steps were stayed by the door, where it was evident that some one was listening.

Beat—beat—beat—beat—again her heart throbbed wildly for a few moments. Then again, heavy pulsations that seemed as if they would make her head split with each agonising pang. Then once more her heart seemed to stop.

Would whoever was listening there see that the key was gone, and ask for it? Would she be compelled to give it up, or

would they keep watch at the door to see that she did not escape?

“Do you want anything?” said the voice of Mrs Walls.

“No—no!” was the answer, and the last speaker’s heart beat more wildly in dread lest her eagerness should excite suspicion.

No! there was no notice taken: the steps went on along the passage, and seemed to descend to an underground kitchen, while for some minutes the prisoner stood motionless as a statue.

All silent once more but the grating noise as the key was softly pushed into the lock. Then slowly—gradually—by a tremendous effort over self, when she was longing to rush out, the key was turned, creaking loudly in the old worn lock. But now the bolt shot back, the handle was turned, and she stood in the passage, after the door had resented the movement by giving two or three loud cracks.

She stood there ready dressed, just in time to hear a sharp voice that she at once recognised exclaim—

“What’s that?”

Then a chair made a loud scraping noise upon the floor below, as if some one had suddenly risen.

There was not a moment to lose ; there were steps already upon the kitchen-stairs as she ran along the passage to the front door. But there was an obstacle here : the door was locked, and a great chain up, whose ring was at the bottom of a spiral.

To turn back the lock was but the work of an instant ; and then she seized the chain and tried to raise it from the spiral fastening, with steps coming nearer at every turn : one—two—three—would it never come off ? Must she be dragged back again when she was so near to liberty ? It was a lifelong task condensed in a few seconds. The last turn—the chain falling with a heavy clang—the door dragged open, as a firm hand grasped her shoulder, and tried to draw her back. Then a wild, despairing shriek rang down Borton Street, as a momentary struggle ensued for liberty.

CHAPTER XXI.

TIM RUGGLES SETS HIMSELF RIGHT.

"MR PELLET, sir," said Tim Ruggles, "I ran out of Mr Purkis's shop, sir, like a madman. Yesterday, sir, I think it was: no, it wasn't, it was the day before, or some other time, I don't know when, for my head's all in a wuzzle, sir, and I hardly know what's what. But I ran out of his shop, sir, after he had whispered two words in my ear, and them two words, sir, were—'Mrs Ruggles.'"

"There!" interrupted Mrs Pellet; "that's all a part of the past now, so let it be forgotten. But sit down."

"Yes, ma'am," said Tim, standing in his old position by the chimney-piece; "it's all a part of the past, but if you'll let me set myself right with your family, I shall be glad."

"Right! set yourself right! why, you are right," said Jared, warmly. "You don't suppose we ever thought that you knew?"

"No, sir," said Tim, still standing; "perhaps not, sir; but I should like to tell you all about it, sir. It will ease my mind, like, so let me be obstinate for once in a way. You see, sir, I was stunned like that morning, and hardly knew what to make of things. Your good lady had partly told me the misfortune, as you may recollect, perhaps, when you came and stopped her, sir—when I rushed off to Mr Purkis's; and then, after a long talk with him, feeling worse than ever, I ran all the way to Carnaby Street, sending the people right and left, sir, for I wouldn't believe it true; and being a married man, sir, which makes two one, it seemed to me that I was in it, and had been the cause of it all, and ungrateful to you, as is the best friend I ever had. No, sir, I wouldn't believe, though young Ichabod Gunnis had told me, and Mrs Pellet had quietly said the same, and then beadle Purkis; but when I rushed up into my room in Carnaby Street—first-floor back, first bell, two pulls—I knew it was all true then, for there was a letter on the table, as I afterwards found was written to Mrs Ruggles' relations to say she was coming. And there

she was, sir, trembling in the middle of the room, dressed and ready to go, sir; Sunday things on, and three or four big bundles about, with all the best of everything we had got packed up; and there was the four tea-spoons, and my first wife's brooch. When I saw all this, I recollected as there was a cab standing at the door when I came in; and then, without her dropping the bundle she was a-tying up, and busting out a-cryin', I knew it all in a moment, that it was all true as true, and that she was going off that morning with everything she could lay her hands on, even to my poor wife's silk dress, only I came back just in time to stop her."

Tim Ruggles covered his face with his hands for a moment, and then went on.

"I'm only little, sir, and poor and weak, and I don't know whether I feel the same as other people do, sir, when they are in trouble; but I couldn't be in a violent rage, and storm and swear and abuse her, sir and ma'am"—and, probably due to the fact of Tim's head being all in a "wuzzle," he looked at Mrs Jared when he said "sir," and at Jared himself when he said "ma'am;"—"No, I

couldn't do it, sir; for there was a strange sort of feeling came over me of our having broken the same bread together for years, she being my wife, and this seemed to stop me; though the nearest point I come to was—but I'm getting wuzzled. I wasn't frightened, sir, not a bit: I was hurt, and cut, and sore, to think that a honest man's wife should have done such a crime; and then made it ten times worse by getting you suspected, because she had a spite against you and Mrs Pellet here, sir, for taking so much notice of my poor Pine, and saying that she was not properly used, for I once let it out that you had said so. Partly that, and partly, you know, because it would clear her; for there was a deal of notice being taken of it all then, so she put the little key in your music-box, sir.

“Put the little key in your music-box, sir,” continued Tim; “it's all true, sir, for she went down upon her knees, sir, and confessed to it all; and how she had had pounds and pounds, and that you caught her that night in the dark, when she had gone to put back a half-crown or two that was marked, and she

was afraid it was found out then ; but it was a letter from the vicar which settled it all. And oh ! sir, if I had only known of all this, I'd never have asked you to speak up for her to be pew-opener. Yes, sir, it was a letter from the vicar had done it all, telling her never to go near the church again, and giving her what we poor journeymen tailors call the bullet.

“ Oh ! I was cut, sir, after all you had done for us, sir, and the customer you had been to me, for it never seemed like coming out to work a day here, sir ; I was always at home, and treated like a friend ; and what with the thoughts of that, and the kind way you had noticed little Pine, and the cruel manner she had treated that poor little dead angel, I worked myself up at last, sir, and I actually said and wished then, that the vicar had not promised that he wouldn't prosecute her ; for she deserved it, sir, if ever a woman did. Yes, sir, I was worked up, and in my rage, I seized the iron, sir, and she shrieked out, and though it was only cold, I thought it wouldn't be manly to hit her with that, so I put it down, and caught up the sleeve-board, and

stood over her with it, quite furious, while she told all, and begged for mercy over and over again. And then, sir, I was that mad that I stamped about the room, and she was frightened of me, hard a woman as she was.

“‘Mind my eyes—mind my eyes!’ she kept on cryin’, as I stood over her, and made her own to all her treachery ; while at times, sir, I didn’t know whether to be mad or to cry with shame, sir ; and to hear her telling all, and then to think of her black-heartedness after it was all found out—going to rob me, sir, and taking even my poor wife’s brooch. It was cruel—cruel—cruel!

“But then,” continued Tim, “I held up, sir, though I could have broken down a score of times, and I spurred myself on by thinking of the way she used to treat poor little Pine, till, seeing me flourish the sleeve-board about in that mad way, sir, the wicked creature was frightened for her life, and, jumping up, and giving me a push, she darted out of the room, and before I got over my surprise, sir, she was gone. And perhaps it was best, sir, or in my rage I might so far have forgotten myself as to have struck her, when, you know,

sir, I should never after have forgiven myself—never, so sure as my name is Tim Ruggles.”

“It’s very sad,” said Mrs Jared, for Tim had paused; “but, of course, after the fright is over, she will come back.”

“Never, ma’am, never,” said Tim. “She has opened a gulf between us, ma’am, that there would be no bridging over—authority for saying so. I’m now, ma’am, what I ought always to have been since my poor wife was taken from me—a widower, and I mean to keep so. No, ma’am, I’m not sorry she’s gone; for though a wonderful woman, ma’am, a most strong-minded woman, ma’am, she was not happy in her ways; and since she has left me, I’ve been thinking things over, and seeing them a little clearer than I used to, and I’m afraid I didn’t do my duty by some one who is passed away and gone. But I’m sorry, sir and ma’am, and what more can I say? being only a weak man, and thinking I was doing all for the best; though I don’t mind saying to you, sir, that what some one else said was quite right: Mrs Ruggles did marry me. . But it’s all over

now, sir: she has gone, and I didn't strike her, sir; for I never should have forgiven myself if I'd struck a woman, bad as she might be."

"Well," said Jared, kindly; "and now suppose we say, let all this be forgotten, and sit down."

"No, sir, not yet," said Tim, "not yet. I'm not done, sir, I've something else to tell you, but perhaps it would be best that Miss Patty should not stay, and you can tell her yourselves afterwards."

Patty rose and left the room.

"You see," said Tim, "I had a visit only yesterday from a decent-looking lady who came with a little quiet knock; and at first I thought she was making a mistake and had come to the wrong room. But no, she knew me well enough, though I did not remember her pale worn face for a minute, until I knew her all at once as little Pine's mother, when, ma'am, I could have run away if I'd had a chance. It did seem so hard to tell her, when she came almost in a threatening way like to ask me for her child, and when I told her it was dead and gone, it was

heartbreaking to see how she took on, and said I'd killed it at first; but the next moment she turned wild and strange, and said the child was not dead, but that I had joined with Mr Richard Pellet to keep her little one from her. And then I was quite frightened, for she told me she was mad, and that she was Mrs Richard Pellet, and that little Pine was her own dear child; and what with wondering whether what she said was true, and puzzling how it could be that my darling was yours too, I got wuzzled; but I told her all I could, and begged of her to listen, but the poor thing seemed quite frantic with her sorrow, and I had to let her go, believing me a cheat and a liar, and that I had been cruel to poor little Pine.

"But there," said Tim, after a pause, "I could only pity her, poor thing, and hope that Time would make all things come right, as I hope he will, sir. But he seems a terrible long while about it, and I'm afraid it won't be in my day; at least I can't seem to see it."

Then Tim found out that he must go, and he hurried away as if not a moment were to

be lost, satisfied now, he said, that he had set himself right, while Jared and his wife stood together thoughtful and silent, the latter with tears in her eyes reproaching herself for not seeing through the mystery sooner.

“For, O Jared!” she said, “if we had only had the poor little thing here, who can tell but its life might have been saved!”

CHAPTER XXII.

IN CHASE.

"FIVE o'clock," said Harry Clayton, as the clerk came in to lay a couple of letters upon the table of his employer's private office. "How long have I been waiting this time?"

"Better than an hour, sir," said the clerk.

"What time do you close?" inquired Harry.

"Five o'clock, sir," said the clerk; "he won't come here now."

"S'pose not," said Harry. "I'll run down to Norwood. Hardly like going without an invite though, now. It won't seem like home," he muttered; and then he looked at the door, as much surprised as the clerk, for there stood the figure of poor Ellen.

"That's the lady he went out with," said the clerk, in an undertone.

"Has he not come back?" said Ellen, hoarsely. "Has not Mr Richard Pellet returned?"

"No," said Harry, quietly. "I am waiting for him."

"Who are you?" said his companion, abruptly.

"Who am I?" said Harry, smiling good-humouredly. "My name is Clayton."

"Her son?" she exclaimed.

"The late Mrs Clayton's son, if that is what you mean; and Mr Pellet is my step-father!"

"I thought so; and where is she?"

"In heaven, I trust," said Harry, reverently.

"Dead! dead! And did he kill her, as he killed me, to marry some one else?"

"Hush!" said Harry. "Perhaps you had better go," he said to the clerk, who was feasting, open-mouthed, upon the gossip banquet before him, but immediately left the room.

"Where is he now?" she said, eagerly.

"At Norwood, I expect," said Harry.

"But, may I ask, who are you?"

"Me!—me!" she exclaimed, passionately.

"I am the woman who has been his slave through life—the woman he drove mad, and then kept hidden away that he might marry

money. I'm mad, I know, but only sometimes—only sometimes. And now—and now, he has robbed me of my child—his child!—no, no! my child—my own darling; and they try to cheat me; they say it is dead. But no, it could not die; it is well and happy, and," she continued, in an undertone, "I have half maddened him. I was here this morning and told him I would have my little one. I would not leave him, but he contrived to evade me." Then, catching Harry's wrist, she whispered a few words in his ear which made him turn pale with horror.

"Nonsense! No, no! not so bad as that," he said, hoarsely.

"Yes, yes, I fear it is. Take me with you now—at once."

Harry stood for a moment thinking, and half confused, at times, too, doubting the wisdom of taking such a companion; then, evidently having formed his plans, he said hurriedly, "Come then!" and in a few minutes they had secured a cab, and were rattling over London Bridge.

A train due in five minutes, but it seemed to them five hours before it came. Off at

last, though ; and very soon after leaving the station their footsteps were crunching over the gravel sweep that led to the front door of Richard Pellet's place, when, as soon almost as they reached the porch, the door flew open, and a burst of warm light greeted them, their approach having been heralded by a bell from the lodge.

"Mr Pellet in?" said Harry to one of the gentlemen in drab and coach-lace.

"Not been gone out ten minutes, sir."

"Do you know where to?" said Harry.

The gentleman in coach-lace looked at his fellow, and then back at Harry, to answer—

"Station, sir ; carriage not come back yet. Came 'ome and had early dinner, and ordered carriage at five."

"No idea where he is gone?" said Harry, anxiously.

The gentleman in coach-lace looked at his fellow once again, before answering, while Ellen whispered to Harry, as she tightly clutched his arm, "Ask him again—again," but there was no need.

"Paris, I think, sir," said the man. "I shouldn't tell any one, sir ; but it can't be

wrong to tell you. Glad to see you here again, sir. Like dinner d'reckly?"

"No, no," said Harry, hesitating. "Did you notice anything particular?—but what makes you say Paris?"

"Because he told me to look what times trains run from London Bridge to Newhaven, sir; and what time the Dieppe boat started. His hand shook so, sir, he couldn't find out for himself."

"Was he ill? Did you see anything particular in him?" said Harry, anxiously.

"Didn't seem himself at all, sir; and did nothing hardly at dinner but drink wine, sir."

"There, there!" whispered Mrs Richard, "I told you so; he is wild, and you must stop him, or he will"——

Harry shuddered, and turned away to snatch his portmonnaie from his pocket and count its contents.

"You had better stay here," he said.

"No, no! I must go with you. I want—— I want to be with you. If anything were to happen—if he committed any rash act, I should feel that his blood was upon my head. Come!" she said, eagerly, and with

a strange look in her eyes. "Come! there is no time to lose. I want —— I want to be on the way."

By consulting *Bradshaw*, Harry found that they might reach Newhaven before the boat started; perhaps catch the very train by which Richard Pellet travelled, though the probability was that they would find him to have an hour's start of them, but by a slow train—that is, if he had gone at all, which Harry was sometimes disposed to doubt. But then he had taken luggage, and had written a direction, so the man said; and in corroboration he brought a blotting-pad, and part of a book of adhesive luggage labels, one of which was written upon; but, perhaps from want of legibility, smeared hastily over. But there, plain enough to read, was the address—"R. Pellet, Hotel Laroche, R——."

That was all. Where would "R" be? Some Rue in Paris, Harry thought; when his eyes fell upon the blotting-pad—one that had hardly been used, but upon which, in reverse, he could now make out the same address, left by another label that had been blotted upon it. "R. Pellet" was perfectly

plain ; and then, with a little puzzling, he made out the rest,—“Hotel Laroche, Rouen.”

“Can we have the brougham?” said Harry, for he was now satisfied.

“D’reckly, sir,” answered the man. But “d’reckly” proved to be a full half-hour afterwards, when, just as Harry was about to set off on foot for the station, the brougham came round to the door, and they stepped in.

“Station—quick !” said Harry.

The man drove quickly ; but they were only in time to see one train glide away through the darkness, leaving them waiting impatiently for the next.

Fortunately for the travellers, the trains succeeded each other very rapidly, and getting out at London Bridge, they had just time to cross over and reach the express as the last bell rang, hurrying into a carriage and giving vent to a sigh of relief as they felt it glide away into the outer darkness.

Gazing out of the window at the lamps here and there dimly seen through the fog that hung over them, Harry’s companion sat without speaking a word. Harry had ventured one or two remarks, but she had only

made an impatient gesture with her hand, and, out of respect for her evident anxiety, he remained silent, and sat pondering over the probable termination of his expedition. It had been so hurried and excited an affair, that he had not before had time to think calmly: neither was a rapid express train upon the Brighton railway a desirable place for quiet meditation.

However, as they rushed along, he tried to link together the incidents that had led to what now seemed like a wild and foolish chase. What would his stepfather say to him for hunting him in this fashion, and for bringing with him this woman? But then her dark suspicion that he was wild with rage, and meditated self-destruction, joined to the accounts he had heard at Norwood of his strange unsettled state, which seemed to tend to the same conclusion, satisfied him upon the whole that he had done right in coming. It was evident that his companion had spoken the truth, and was connected with his stepfather in some way, from the clerk having pointed her out as the lady with whom his employer had gone out that morning.

"It must be right," muttered Harry ; and then his thoughts strayed away for awhile to Duplex Street, and he found himself forming plans for the future, in which Patty Pellet occupied a very prominent place.

His train of thought was interrupted by his companion uttering a moan, as though in deep distress ; but, thinking it better not to intrude, he leaned back in his place, and the rest of the journey was performed in silence.

Newhaven at last, with the keen breeze blowing off the sea. Night black as Erebus, and the glimmering lamps looking down upon half-thawed snow lying here and there in patches. No fog visible, every wreath of vapour being chased away by the brisk breeze ; but an utterly desolate aspect of misery everywhere, which made the warm glow of the great new-looking hotel-rooms pleasant by contrast.

"Boat, sir? half-an-hour, sir. Just time for refreshments, sir. Stout grey gentleman, sir, by last train? Not here, sir. Yes, sir, quite sure ; must have known if one had come ; perhaps gone to the little hotel in the town. Time to go and get back before the boat

started? Should think not, sir; leastwise shouldn't like to try."

So said the waiter; and Harry and his companion started out into the dark night to search waiting-room, wharf, and steamer, deck and cabin, for him of whom they were in quest.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE END OF A JOURNEY.

“PERHAPS, after all, he has not come,” said Harry to his silent companion, for no word left her lips ; she only restlessly led him from place to place, pressing his arm with her hand when she wished him to speak to porter or guard. Once he heard her mutter a few words—“ To escape and hide—taken her there ;” but she made no reply to his remark.

They had searched the waiting-rooms of the station and hotel, paced up and down the wharf, boarded the steamer, and examined every labelled berth, but there was no sign of either Richard Pellet or his luggage. Then they returned to the pier, and watched in the direction that would be taken by any one coming from the little hotel in the town, till a blinding storm of wind-borne snow would have made Harry lead his companion into shelter, but she seemed not to pay the

slightest heed to the weather, as she gazed incessantly here and there, trying to catch a glimpse of the missing man.

The mooring cables creaked and groaned as the steamer rose and fell upon the swell in the little harbour, the water rushing fiercely past, black and angry, save where it broke and glistened now and again upon the bows of a boat, or upon the piles and piers around, while the snow fell fitfully in great soft pats, whirled here and there, each flake darting from its fellow when they passed the lamps, which flickered and danced as the squalls penetrated every nook and cranny. Now the platform and pier would be white, but in a few moments a black patch would break out here, another there, growing rapidly larger, till, once more, all would be a wet, slippery, blackened sheet, upon whose surface the rays of the lamps flickered and blinked.

A bitter night—cold, dark, and dreary; the men about, clad in oilskin wrappers, which glistened with the wet that streamed down them as the snow melted. Nearly every one carried a lanthorn to swing about

as a signal to guide his steps amongst the railway trucks. Dark clouds floated by, to halt now and then, and send shimmering down what seemed a winding-sheet of snow. Then would come a moaning gust of wind, sweeping the heavier clouds away, to leave the heavens but little lighter. The few passengers bound for Dieppe hurried across the pier, and made the best of their way on board to secure their berths, perhaps with no very pleasant anticipations of the coming night, and, saving for here and there a railway official with a lanthorn, scarcely a soul was to be seen as Harry and his companion still kept watch in the direction of the town.

The time had nearly expired, so nearly, that if Richard Pellet were to take his departure by that steamer, he must be there within the next five minutes, while upon their once more going on board, and questioning the steward respecting the advent of a short, stout, grey gentleman, that functionary, evidently put somewhat out of temper by the weather, and the poor array of passengers, incontinently cursed the stout gentleman, and turned his back upon the querists, who made

their way back over the slippery deck, crossed the gangway, and again began to pace up and down upon the landing-stage.

If Richard Pellet had come down, which Harry now very much doubted, he must, as the waiter had suggested, have gone into the town, and Harry now repented that he had not at once hurried on there, and made inquiries. For, though he kept scouting the idea as absurd, and telling himself that his stepfather had some other reason for coming down here, his imagination was full of horrors suggested by his memory of destroyed directions and cards, and of men who had sought hotels in remote places to do some deed which should only produce an inquest on the body of a man unknown, unrecognised, unclaimed, so that the memory of the horror might soon pass away, and relatives only know that one of their family was missing.

His fears must though, he felt, be groundless, for Richard Pellet, wealthy, prosperous, was not the man to make an end of his life; but then he might not after all be prosperous; his affairs might be in a hopeless state of confusion; and now this strange connection

with the woman at his side might have urged him to flight or the commission of the crime at which she had hinted.

But might not the woman be deceiving him? A glance, though, at the anxious, pallid face at his side, showed him plainly enough that even if she believed not the words she had uttered, she was moved by some strong impulse to overtake his stepfather; and, after all, what she had whispered might be true.

At last he determined to speak—to question her; but it was in vain, for he could obtain no answer. In fact, she had, in her eagerness to overtake the man whom she believed to have her child, forgotten the ruse that she had used to set Harry in search of his stepfather. It was the half insane prompting of her fevered brain; but as soon as her object was effected, it was entirely forgotten—crushed out of her memory by the intense desire to overtake him. Richard Pellet and her child: there seemed room for nothing else in her thoughts; and once only had she spoken to Harry during the last quarter of an hour of their watch, and then

only to inquire whether there was any other boat, and when answered in the negative, she relapsed into her former silence.

The night darker than ever, a star now and then appearing, but only to be directly blotted out by some dense cloud ; whenever a light patch of sky was visible low down on the horizon, the interlacing rigging and masts of the few vessels about could be seen rocking to and fro, while the steamer lights rose and fell in a way that betokened rough weather in the Channel. In the intervals of the squalls, too, would be heard the long, low roar of the sea, breaking upon the beach below the chalk cliffs that towered away to the west, or round by the sandy bay by Seaford. Waves rose, too, and washed with a heavy dash against the pier at the harbour entrance ; and more than once Harry had heard it hinted that the steamer would not put to sea in such weather.

But the hints were from those ill-informed : the steamer was bound for Dieppe that night, and as Harry and his companion stood by the gangway, looking down upon the vessel's deck, the paddles began to revolve, and

Harry thought she had started, and that he had come, after all, on an errand of folly—such an one as a little forethought would have stayed him from attempting. But the boat was not yet off: the movement had only been to ease the strain upon the cables stretched on to the landing-place, for, as if eager to set off, the vessel had been tugging at them, until one threatened to part.

Another squall, and a fall of snow, during which the last bell rang, and a man shouted to Harry to know if he were going on board.

“No,” he answered, but hesitatingly, as if it were possible that he whom they sought might, after all, be in the steamer; but it was too late now to search, for two men seized the gangway to draw it back, as the signal was given to go on. The wheels creaked, and the first beat of the paddle was heard, when the figure of a man bearing a valise was seen to hurry down towards the boat.

What followed seemed to occupy but a moment or two, and Harry felt powerless to do more than look on. For, as he first caught sight of and recognised the figure in spite of its wrappings, he was suddenly thrust

back, and his companion darted forward, half shrieking, "My child! where is she?"

Richard Pellet stopped, turned, as if to hurry back; but the next moment he dropped the valise and ran a few steps forward along the edge of the landing-stage, as if to leap the distance between that and the steamer as she came by. Then he turned for an instant, just in time to see a woman wrest herself from a man who had tried to stay her: in another second she was upon him, crying, as she grasped at his breast, "Give me my child!"


Then there was a shout, a shriek, and Richard Pellet had stepped backward to fall from the wharf in front of one of the paddle-boxes, where his wife would have followed, but for one of the men, who dragged her away.

And what saw those who had rushed to the edge of the wharf, holding their lanthorns, and swinging them to and fro, while others flung ropes, or rushed to the places where boats were moored? The black, gliding hull of the steamer, the turbulent water, churned into a white foam by the beating paddles, and a momentary glimpse of a grey head and two

raised hands, as they were sucked into the stream, and beaten beneath the floats, which crashed down heavily upon the drowning man's head, before there was a clank, clanking noise in the engine-room, and the huge wheels ceased to revolve.

Then, as the white foam was swept away, and the steamer lay to, the life-buoy was thrown over, men were seen with lanthorns in boats rising and falling upon the black water, which reflected the gleam of the light ; but in spite of searchings here and there, backwards and forwards, no one was seen clinging to the life-buoy, or hauled into either of the boats ; no grey head or appealing hands were visible at the summit of a wave or in its hollow ; black water only, everywhere, save when it curled back in a creamy foam from shore or pile.

Then came once more the order, "Go on a-head !" the "clink, clank, clank," in the engine-room, where there was a warm red glow from furnace-doors, and the hot smell of oil and steam, a loud hiss or two, the huge cylinders, beginning to swing to and fro, and the pistons to rise and fall with their cranks,



churning the black water again into white foam. Then the stern lights of the steamer might be seen rising and falling as she passed out of the harbour mouth, and slowly, one by one the boats returned to their moorings, and those who had manned them, to the landing-stage.

"Name on portmanter, R. Pellet," said one man in wet oilskins, holding down his lantern, and examining the little black valise as it lay upon the pier, now covered with snow-flakes. "Very shocking, but I don't see as we could have saved him, or done more than we did."

"Get his body to-morrow, d'ye think?" said a bystander with a short pipe to a fishy-looking man in a blue jersey and a sou'-wester.

"May be yes, may be no," said the man addressed; "but most like no, for he'll be carried out to sea, safe as wheat."

Then there was a buzz of voices as fresh faces appeared on the scene.

"Here, for God's sake, help!" exclaimed Harry Clayton, sick himself almost unto death; "this lady has fainted."

CHAPTER XXIV.

AFTER A LAPSE.

"I CANNOT refrain from writing to congratulate you, my dear Clayton," wrote Sir Francis Redgrave, in a letter the young man sat reading in his rooms at Cambridge, as he leaned back, his temples throbbing, worn out with the arduous mental struggle in which he had been engaged. "Such an honour," said Sir Francis, "is, I know, not easily earned, and I feel that yours has been a long and gallant fight. It would have afforded me great pleasure if Lionel had been gifted with your assiduity, and been possessed of similar tastes ; but I have never tried to force him. I can get from him but few letters now, so can readily suppose that you have not been more favoured, and are therefore, most likely, not aware of his engagement. I enter into these details with you, on account of the interest you have always displayed in all concerning him. The lady is one whom he has

churning the black water again into white foam. Then the stern lights of the steamer might be seen rising and falling as she passed out of the harbour mouth, and slowly, one by one the boats returned to their moorings, and those who had manned them, to the landing-stage.

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many months since he had seen Patty, she had never been long absent from his thoughts even in his busy college life. He had, however, refrained from seeking the Pellet family in the new home to which they had removed on the sudden accession of wealth consequent on his stepfather's death, until his industry and perseverance had brought forth fruit of which he might be justly proud.

On the day after the receipt of Sir Francis Redgrave's letter, Harry had taken up his temporary abode in one of the hotels in the neighbourhood of the Strand, and set out at once to find Jared's new residence at Highgate. He was disappointed, however, in his hope of seeing Patty, and there was something like constraint in the manner in which Mrs Jared informed him of her absence.

He made a second visit early the next day, but with no better success; and on coming away shaped his course towards the scene of so many adventures. First, he had a look at the old Duplex Street house, and then went on, intending to call on the little Frenchman and Janet, who, as the former had resolved,

had left the naturalist's house as soon as he was sufficiently recovered from the effects of his accident.

Finding that he would be within a short distance of Brownjohn Street, he altered his route in a degree so as to stroll through the well-remembered locality, and pay a visit, *en passant*, to the shop of the naturalist, should he still find it in the occupation of its old tenant.

As Harry Clayton entered the close neighbourhood of Decadia, he could scarcely fancy but that he had left London a week since—the aspect of the district seemed the same.

There was the squalid teeming place as of old, rejoicing in all its minglings of animated nature; the children tumbled still in the gutters; the gin-palaces drove thriving trades; costermongers' barrows were piled with shell-fish; and the slatternly women and hulking soft-handed men, hung about or sat on the doorsteps.

But Brownjohn Street was not quite the same, for there was a brightness about D. Wragg's house, evidently due to paint; and

upon approaching more closely, Harry found that D. Wragg seemed to be fuller of "natur'" than ever.

He was in the shop as Harry entered the doorway, and his face brightened with genuine pleasure as he recognised his visitor, and he commenced jigging and working about at a tremendous rate ; but the next minute he had spread the newspaper he was reading upon the counter, and began to smooth it over a few times, and make it perfectly straight.

"You're just in time, sir," he said. "Only look here," and he tapped the paper over and over again. "Isn't it a game? Five years' penal. Came out after his twelvemonth for your job, and then got in for it again. I always said he must come to it. 'Don't you make no mistake, Jack Screwby,' I says, 'you'll be dropped on hotter yet some day ; mark my words if you won't.' For, you see, as soon as he was out, he used to come worrying and cheeking me again. 'It'll come to you, my lad, see if it won't.' And now there it all is down in black and white : 'Violent assault and 'tempt to murder.' Lots o' that sort o' thing about here, bless you ! And I

could take you out here of an evening, and point you out half a hundred o' birds o' that sort as want the same kind o' salt put on their tails. But there ! Jack Screwby's gone, and we shan't see no more of him for five years certain."

"And how is Mrs Winks ?" said Harry.

"There ain't no such person living here at all now, sir," said D. Wragg, pulling up his collars, and speaking with dignity. "Don't you make no mistake, sir. Mrs Winks is no more ; and busy as a bee has she been this very week, marking all her linen over again in big letters—W, R, A, G, G—though I kep' on telling her—such is the beautiful, clean, tidy, mending natur' of that woman—as there wasn't a rag among 'em."

"What ! married ?" ejaculated Harry, with real surprise.

"Married it is, sir. Don't you make no mistake. We both found the place awful lonely as soon as our lodgers had gone ; and what with the theayter getting unpleasant on account of Mrs Winks being stouter than she used to, and people's knees getting a deal in her way when she went round with her

basket, and me having so much natur' in hand to attend to, we agreed between ourselves as she should give the theayter up, and take a share in this here business, sir, and all under one name, sir."

"And a very wise act too," said Harry, smiling.

"Twenty years did I know her, sir, before I made the venter; and I don't mind tellin' you, sir, as is a gent I respex, if Mrs D. Wragg wasn't quite so stout, she'd be an angel. But there, sir, don't you make no mistake. I'm as happy as the day's long; and talk about people's pussonal appearance! why, look at me!"

In his modest self-disparagement, D. Wragg again became quite mechanical in his fits and starts, ending by crumpling up the newspaper, and sweeping an empty cage from the counter with his turnip-sowing arm.

"Looks are nothing, Mr Wragg, if the heart is right," said Harry, smiling; "but I must be going. I thought I would look in as I passed."

"Thanky, sir, thanky, which it's very kind; but just a minute, sir. I wanted to tell you

as I've quite done with the dorg business, and refused lots of commissions; and now, though I say it, as didn't oughter, there ain't a squarer shop in all London than this here. You'd hardly believe it, sir, but if I didn't sell that there Sergeant Falkner a canary bird and cage last week, I'm a Dutchman. Brings his missus with him to choose it, he does, and calls agen yesterday—no, the day afore—to say as it sings splendid, and shook hands when he went, quite friendly. But won't you take just a taste o' something before you go, sir? The missus will be put out at not seeing you; stepped out, she has, for a few potatoes. And how we have talked about you, surely! Look here, sir, here's the werry thing as I hung up in that winder as soon as he was found—and none too soon neither, for I was obligated to have my shutters up for a week, and they did smash half a dozen of the first-floor panes as it was. 'There,' says I to the people, 'don't you make no mistake: I ain't burked the gent as took it into his head to dress up and come to see——' But there! I wont say no more—and I hung out that, sir."

1

As D. Wragg spoke, he produced a dusty, smoke and fly-stained card, upon which, in large type, was printed—

THE GENT IS FOUND.

HE WAS RUN OVER

BY

A C A B!!!

(Signed) D. WRAGG.

“That there cost me two-and-six, sir; but don’t you make no mistake, it saved me one pound two and six in winders, and ever so much more in character. But is there anything in my way before you go, sir? Always happy to supply you, and can do a stroke of almost everything in natur’, except dorgs, which, as I said afore, I’ve quite done with; for, you see, sir, dorgs ain’t respectable, and don’t do now.”

Harry had some difficulty in getting away without seeing Mrs D. Wragg; but he urged that his time was precious, and at last, after

a hearty hand-shake, he was allowed to continue his way, thinking very deeply, as he wandered slowly on, till he reached a quiet little street near to that named after the great Northumbrian earl—a tame, empty, flat, and apparently, to a spectator, highly unprofitable, double row of houses, upon the door of one of which was a brass-plate bearing the words—

MONSIEUR CANAU,

Professor of Music.

CHAPTER XXV.

VIVE L'AMOUR.

"YES, Mr Canau is at home," said a very mealy-faced girl, who replied to Harry Clayton's knock ; and he was shown into a barely-furnished but neat parlour, to wait while, apparently, some lesson was being concluded in the back room, where a voice could be heard counting loudly :—"ONE, *two*, three ; ONE, *two*, three ;" and a duet between piano-forte and violin appeared to be in fierce progress. Then there was silence, a buzz of voices, and very tightly dressed, very fierce-looking—with his closely-cut hair, as he walked behind an enormous moustache,—the little exile entered.

"Ah ! *mon chère, chère ami !*" he exclaimed ; and in a moment his arms were round his visitor. But directly after, he seemed to recollect himself, and drew back hastily to hold out his hand. "I beg pardon—thou-

sand pardons ; but I shall never be an Englishman."

Then, running to the door, he cried in a loud voice, "*Mes amis—mes amis—entrez.*"

Harry Clayton's heart beat, as the next minute Jared Pellet entered with Patty and Janet, who both started with surprise, Patty colouring deeply, and the latter looking from one to the other with something nearly akin to anger.

Harry hesitated but for one moment ; and then, obeying the dictates of his heart, and heedless of the presence of father and friends, caught Patty in his arms, and kissed her tenderly.

"Aha !" said Canau ; "but you do not apologise, as I did, *mon ami*. I did draw back, and make offer of my hand."

"So I do—now and for ever," cried Harry, "if Patty here will take it. You will forgive me, I know, Mr Pellet, for seeming brusque, but I cannot talk,—I cannot make professions. I am indeed, though, earnest and true, and I believe that you have read me aright."

"Yes, yes—yes, yes," said Jared, softly. "I know, but it is not for me to read. We

will go and sit with Janet, and you will join us soon."

"But, papa!" cried Patty, blushing a deeper crimson, as she hurried to his side.

"Well, my child," he said, as he kissed her white forehead fondly, "shall I stay then?"

"Miss Pellet will, I hope, give me a short interview alone," said Harry, crossing to her side as Canau and Janet left the room.

"Patty, dear Patty," he said, "I am no courtly wooer, only a poor student."

"No, no!" exclaimed Jared. "Haven't we seen the honours you have won?"

"I have little to offer," continued Harry, "but the true love of an honest man; but it is so true, so unselfish a love, that I blush not to offer it here in your father's presence. But I have much to learn from you, for I tremble—this is not the welcome I had hoped to receive. You shrank from me almost with coldness, though you know that from our first meeting I have loved you. Mine may be a simple love, but I offer you a heart that never gave thought to another. But still I would not press you for that which was not

yours to give. Tell me that you are not free in thought, and I will say no more."

There was a few moments' pause, during which Jared fiercely stroked his cheek, and then thrust his hands into his pockets, shrugging his shoulders almost up to his ears, *à la* Canau,—but, though Patty essayed to speak, her words were inaudible, as she covered her face with her hands and burst into tears.

Treading upon tip-toe as if he were amongst pedal-keys, Jared softly left the room, and for the next few minutes, Harry, grown eloquent with affection, pleaded his cause earnestly, till Janet glided in, looking curiously from one to the other.

"Ah, Janet!" exclaimed Harry, catching her hands in his, "you know how I have loved her from the first. You will speak for me, will you not?"

"No; why should I?" said Janet, coldly, as she turned from him to Patty, taking her to her breast in a motherly fashion, as if to protect her. "She is rich now, and you are proud to know her; but look back at when she was poor. You were ashamed to know

her then before your fine friends. And then look at your cruel suspicions. Do you think I could not read them all? I have told her a hundred times over that yours was but a passing fancy—that you saw her pretty face, and liked it, and—and that was all.”

“I was weak and unjust, I know,” said Harry; “but have I not tried to expiate my sin? But why do you speak of a passing fancy? What do you mean? How can you be so unjust? Are there to be fresh riddles now?”

“Why should you trouble her when you are promised to some one else?” cried Janet, fiercely, as she turned upon him, holding Patty to her breast the while, and stroking her luxuriant hair.

“I! Promised to some one else?” exclaimed Harry. “Well, yes,” he added, gloomily. “I suppose it is to be so—to Alma Mater—to my studies.”

“Hush, Patty. No; I will not be silent,” cried Janet, excitedly; for Patty had turned imploringly to her. “I *will* speak to him—I will not be silent. Have you,” she exclaimed to Harry, “have you forgotten your stay in

Essex, at a pleasant house with a lawn in front, stretching down to the road?"

She looked at him searchingly, as if she would read his very thoughts, while she awaited his answer.

"Forgotten! no, certainly not," said Harry. "Nearly two years ago, was it not?"

"Yes, yes; I see that you remember," cried Janet, with a tinge of sarcasm in her tones.

"Well!" said Harry, looking from one to the other in evident perplexity, for Patty's eyes were fixed upon him anxiously, as if her happiness depended upon his answer.

"Well!" said Janet, scornfully, "do you remember?"

"You are speaking in riddles," cried Harry, almost angrily, in his turn. "What does this mean? If you allude to my visit nearly two years since, with a brother student to his home—yes, I was there a week—a pleasant, happy week of home-life, such as I have seldom known."

"Happy, no doubt," said Janet, harshly.

There was a simple look of wonder and bewilderment in Harry's face that directly

disarmed suspicion, and the harsh aspect slowly faded from Janet's countenance as the young man said calmly—

“Janet, I cannot understand what you would accuse me of; but it cannot be any falling away from my love for Patty; and as to being promised to another, I never till now spoke words of love to woman.”

The doubt and suspicion faded away still further, to leave poor Janet's countenance almost sweet in its expression of loving sadness, as she turned away to whisper in her friend's ear, and to kiss her fondly; and her eyes were suffused with tears, as she gently pressed back Patty's clinging hands, and glided from the room.

For, trembling, fluttering, half-pained, half-joyous, Patty would have followed, but there were other hands to arrest her half-way; and as the door softly swung to, she felt herself drawn unresisting, now, closer and closer, to another's breast.

Shall we tell of the words that fell now from Harry's impassioned lips?—of the gentle, dove-like eyes that now looked up, half-scared, half-wonderingly in his, till that look

was subdued and softened into one that was all love? Of the hour, that fled like minutes, as he drew the yielding little form closer, till her breath fanned his cheek, and her red, half-pouted lips seemed to ask the kiss they dared not then return? Enough, if we say that, as Harry sat proudly there, and whispered of the future, it was with a little head nestling in his breast; and when—how long after, neither knew—Jared was heard loudly approaching the room, violently humming one of the melodies from “Zampa,” and, of course, so pre-occupied, that he stumbled over the mat, and kicked it back into its place before rattling the door-handle and entering, they did not move; why should they?

Jared stood and gazed for a moment with bended head, half smiling, and evidently about to utter some bantering remark; but it did not leave his lips, which began to twitch, and his face to work as he turned from them.

“Father, dear father!” cried Patty, as she fled to his side, “you are not angry?”

“Angry? No, my darling, I am not

angry," and he drew her to him to kiss her tenderly. "I am not angry, but glad and thankful to see my child happy. It brings back thoughts of old times when I—but this will not do. And what will somebody at home say to it all? I am a weak old fogey, and let you have your own way, but there is moth—I mean mamma, to consult, remember."

At that moment the door was once more softly opened, and Janet entered slowly, to look at the trio inquiringly, till in Harry's happy face she read all she wished to learn, and pressed his hand as he led her to a chair, sitting down by her side, and talking to her for some time, so that father and daughter might converse for a while without interruption.

Evening fell upon them unawares, and the black shadows made Janet's countenance darker still, as, at last, gazing earnestly in Harry's face, she laid one bony hand on his, and tried to speak, but the words died inaudibly away.

"Did you wish to ask me something?" said Harry, softly; for he had in those happy hours learned the poor girl's secret.

"Yes."

"You may trust me," he said, gently; "but you are a woman of strong good sense. Let me ask you something first—Is it wise?"

"I think so," said Janet, sadly. "I am not mad now. I suffered then, but it has passed away, to leave me wiser and better, I hope. Do you think," she added, somewhat bitterly, "that I shall be like the little one that cried for the moon?"

Harry was silent for a while, thinking, but he was interrupted by Janet's whisper—

"Tell me—is he well?"

"Yes," said Harry.

"And you have seen him?"

"Not for above a year."

"But you have had news; tell me what it is."

Harry was again thoughtful and silent. Should he tell her or no? The blow must come some day; had it not better fall upon her now, and be at an end?

"Do you fear to tell me?" she said again.

Harry's answer was to draw Sir Francis Redgrave's letter from his pocket, and place it in her hands.

"Read it," he said, "when you are alone."

CHAPTER XXVI.

AT THE NEW HOME.

PARTED at last, for Harry had seen father and daughter into an omnibus, one which must have been Ben Jonson's "chariot at hand here of love, in which my lady rideth," and drawn by swans or doves, instead of a jangling piece of wood and iron work, with a wretched knacker on either side of the pole. How memory, though, dwelt upon her whose soft kiss—the first—was yet dewy sweet upon his lips—upon his, for she was his promised wife; and as he passed through the streets, walking as if upon air, flushed, proud, happy, he saw nothing but the bright future his fancy painted.

Then came the recollection of Janet, and he admired her as he thought of the calm resignation with which she seemed to pour out the lavish tenderness of her nature upon Patty.

At this point Harry glided selfishly away

again in thought to add fresh colouring to his happy future.

Harry was early at Highgate the next day, to find Mrs Jared very stern and uncompromising ; but he was too much for her in his downright honest declaration.

“ Don’t be hard upon me, Mrs Pellet—don’t send me away ; for indeed I love her very, very dearly.”

Mrs Jared was beaten, as well she might be, for there were Jared and Patty looking on. It was not consistent, she knew ; but Harry stayed that day and dined with them, and saw Jared ready to go off to the vicar’s, stay to have a string tucked in here—Jared always was great in strings—and a brushing there ; while, in the exertion of making the most of himself, he burst a pearl button off his wrist-band.

And now Patty was called into requisition to sew that button on again ; and I vow and declare that the fresh disc of pearl which she held between her lips while she made a knot at the end of her thread, was not so bright and pure-looking as the little regular teeth over which Harry went into raptures.

Who would not have been Jared, and had that downy cheek laid against his wrist? Why, if it had been any other wrist, it must have beat and throbbed at a redoubled rate! Or who would not have been the thread which Patty bit in two when the button had been duly stabbed in all its eyes over and over again? Why, that thread must have been conscious, and enjoyed it, or it never would have held out so long, instead of being bitten through at first!

Jared gone, leaving Harry Clayton in his fold amongst the lambs of his flock. Very reprehensible, no doubt; but no worse than Mrs Jared's behaviour. For though left at home as guardian, she either turned wilfully blind, or else her assertion was true that there was so much to settle and arrange that she thought she never should get to be at home in her new house. In fact, she was constantly away; and when by chance she did come into the room, it was to murmur to Patty about some precious thing or another that she was sure must have been left at Duplex Street.

Strange proceedings there were that after-

noon at Highgate. Why could not Harry allow Patty to busily ply her needle instead of insisting upon holding one hand in his? Why, too, must he fancy that he had grown domestic, and want to help and prepare the tea? for in spite of the change in circumstances, it was hard work for Mrs Pellet and Patty to break themselves of their old homely ways. Harry kept the latter in a state of nervous flutter the whole time as he whispered. But then, at a certain stage in their existence, people do make themselves so absurd, or rather, as Richard Pellet used to say, "such fools." The fact is, lovers imagine the whole world to be blind to their actions, when the fact is—bless the sweet innocence of their hearts!—the handkerchief is around their own eyes.

Yes; Harry must make the toast, which ought now, of course, to have been made in the kitchen—and fill up a great deal of the available space by the fire, manifesting not the slightest intention of going away so long as he could feast his eyes. There was no one there but a couple of small Pellets—little round Pellets, who sat very still, and looked

on most solemnly. It was not at all surprising, seeing how such instruction is neglected at our great seats of learning, that Harry Clayton, in spite of honours, should burn that toast very often, and leave great white patches where all should have been brown.

Yes ; they were as homely as ever at Highgate, though in the midst of plenty ; for Mrs Jared said that she could never settle to the ways adopted by some people, even if she had a million a week. And now she was away inspecting a regiment of white jam-pots suffering from an attack of mould ; so if there was any cause for the ruddy glow in Patty's cheeks, it must have been due to a combination of Mrs Jared's unconventional behaviour, and the example set by Adam and Eve some little time since ; though there is still the possibility of the fire being to blame.

That afternoon glided away magically, and Jared was late for tea. It did not matter in the least, though he apologised for being so long away. And then what an evening was spent ! for Canau arrived with Janet and a long black case, the sight of which set Jared's fingers strumming upon the table.

Musical, of course, they were all the evening, and to Patty the notes now were those of love. But there was room for sadness even then, and Patty's heart felt heavy as she saw the yearning, eager, almost envious look in Janet's eyes, and thought of the poor girl's future, till she crossed the room, and told her that she should always be happy could they but be near.

CHAPTER XXVII.

IN THE REFLECTOR.


JARED PELLET used to declare with a grim smile that he thought he had been more happy as a poor man in Duplex Street than he was now that he had inherited his brother's property and thriving business; for he had never known how much misery, poverty, and wretchedness was in the world before the secretaries of different charities began taking ample care to keep him well-informed upon the subject. Jared used to say he thought, he was not sure though, he almost found the money a trouble to him; in fact, it would have been a burden if he had not somewhat lightened it by the arrangement he made respecting Harry and the money brought by his mother into the firm. He did not now find so much time for dreaming over his old organ, sooner than part from

which he would almost have given up the worldly goods now in his possession.

The old house was kept on for some time in Duplex Street almost intact; and when it was decided to give it up, Mrs Jared had a good long cry over it, in spite of its pinched looks and bare rooms, but where she said that she had passed so many, many happy hours, gone never to return.

Wonderful was the collection of odds and ends brought away to be deposited in the wealthy new home—one and all articles that it was declared to be impossible to leave behind. One was Jared's glue-pot, which showed its malignant disposition to the very last, and, after being wrapped up carefully in paper, proved to have a quantity of nasty, foul, sticky water somewhere in its internal regions, which ran out all over the other objects packed in the box.

Patty, too, must be obstinate about the old tin-kettle of a piano, with the rusty wires, being left behind. What were instruments of great compass from Broadwood or Collard? They could not make her feel that she was to desert old friends. How many boxes of



strange pieces of ware, and fragments of this and that, were packed up under the name of playthings, it is hard to say.

One, at least, of Mrs Jared's weaknesses has been already mentioned. This may not come in the same list, but during the arrangements what time the house in Duplex Street was turned what she called inside out, and the question was in full discussion as to what was to be taken, what left to be sold, this lady suddenly exclaimed, in answer to expostulations—"What! leave that rolling-pin and paste-board? No, not if I know it: I've had them twenty years, and"—

The remainder of Mrs Jared's speech was inaudible from her head suddenly disappearing in the depths of a big box, where she was rolling the implements in question in the folds of an old scorched ironing-blanket for safety. It is worthy of remark, that at the time Mrs Jared was packing, her jacket was hung beside her on the knob of the door, and that jacket was handsome, and of ermine.

"Well, dear, is there anything else you would like to take?" said Jared.

"Yes; that there is!" was the reply, as

Mrs Jared took down a bunch of extremely dusty sweet herbs from a hook in the kitchen ceiling, and placed it beside the swaddled rolling-pin. "Yes; the things were hard enough to get together, and somehow I can hardly realise, even now, that we can afford to leave them behind!"

After that night in the church, Jared took a dislike to the reflector, for as to giving up the right to conducting the service at St Runwald's, that was out of the question, and Mr Timson used to boast to the vicar that they had not only the best, but the richest organist in London. And it was only occasionally, as a personal favour, to one of the above gentlemen, that a stranger was allowed to try the instrument.

That reflector Jared took down himself from over the keyboard of the organ, and old Purkis bore it into the damp vestry, where in course of time its reflective power became almost *nil*.

But though Jared no longer possessed a reflector in which he could gaze and dream, and conjure up the past, yet one has a mirror

of the mind upon which, after a breath, the surface shines as I sit late this wintry night, as Purkis sat of old in the dim shades of the gloomy old church, listening to the inspiring music of the grand old organ, thundering in peals, wailing in sighs, or pouring forth jubilant melody. For above me in the distance, from behind a curtain suspended to a brass rod, rises a faint glow as from some soft light, above which start up, like the golden pillars dimly seen when the northern lights flush the wintry sky, the mighty pipes whose summits are in the deep obscurity which clouds the open roof of the edifice. And in my mirror what is there first? An indelible picture? No; for it fades to give place to others, as now there is visible Jared's patient lined old face poring over music-book and key-board by the light of one feeble candle which seems to shed a halo round his quaint old head.

Now the interior of the old church by day, with Jared at the organ. A bright spring morning, and the organist in the morning costume of a glossy black dress-coat and

trousers—Tim Ruggles' cut for a ducat!—white vest, and patent leather-boots. His grizzly hair has a peculiar knotty appearance; and did any mirror reflect odours, most surely there would be a smell of curling-tongs and singeing. There is a camellia, too, in his button-hole, and he has just hurried up-stairs, splitting a pair of white kid-gloves all to ribbons in dragging them off. Crash! That's the brass curtain-rings on the rod, so that Jared can screw himself round and gaze down into the church, now that he has taken a music-book from the locker and placed it upon the stand of the opened organ.

The sun streams through the tinted windows in golden and ruddy glories piercing the sombre twilight of the church with rays whereon dance myriad motes of dust—dust perhaps mingled with that of the generations of the past. Jared is looking over the heads of many people anxiously towards the chancel; and now seems to come a strange rushing sound, and a dull creak, creak, which makes the towering old instrument to shudder. But that is only Ichabod Gunnis, grown tall and

out of leathers, toiling away at the long handle of the bellows till the little weight tells that the wind-chest is full.

And now here comes the party which Jared left in the vestry, for there is a buzz of excitement in the church, and heads are craning, while Tim Ruggles is so excited that he stands up on the cushions of the pew he helps to occupy so as to have a better view of what is going on.

Here they come! No, they don't; that's only old Purkis in full uniform, plump, ruddy, glistening with moisture that he is too dignified to remove, as he rolls solemnly down the nave towards the door, waving the people back with his cane. Smile? Not he! beadles don't smile in public life, only when out of uniform; and as to using a handkerchief, he could not do that, unless compelled by such a fleshquake or sneeze as now shakes Mr Purkis's frame, caused by that sooty dust that pervades the church, and not by damp.

But now they do come: Patty leaning upon the arm of Harry Clayton; Timson next, rounder than ever, with Janet on his arm—bridesmaids—more friends—a bright

confusion of figures, with only one here and there to be recognised in the mirror. But there is Canau; there Mr Grey, who has doffed his surplice; and, right at the back, there is Mrs Purkis, crying and laughing together, but turning solemn directly after, as becomes the pew-opener of St Runwald's.

Peal up the wedding-march, old Jared! But Jared can't play; not he. He has blundered several chords, though no one is a bit the wiser. He would break down, only he has known the piece by heart for years. There is music open, stave and cleff and crotchet and quaver; but the big-headed notes seem to be bobbing up and down upon their spindle bodies, and wagging their tails, and waltzing round and round. And really the book might just as well be in the locker as upon the stand; for, though Jared knows it not, it is upside down. There is dew all over Jared's spectacles, and they refuse to be seen through, while a great tear has trickled down, gathering strength from affluents as it proceeds, till it hangs upon the tip of Jared's nose, to go plash down at last upon the central G natural of the fingerboard. And there are

more weak tears stealing down from behind his spectacles to moisten his cheeks. They might be taken for perspiration, since he is smiling as he plays mechanically, for he never performed in a more soulless fashion in his life.

But then he always was weak, and queer, and unbusinesslike; and "some people are such fools!" It could hardly be expected that at such a time he should be exact in his fingering; but his actions are so odd that one might say, "Bring a strait waistcoat," only that he is in one already, which crackles at every motion. And now comes a dismal groan, due to the exciting event; for, probably for only the third or fourth time in his life—being, in spite of his vagaries, a most exemplary bellows-boy—Ichabod has let the wind out of the organ.

It does not matter, for the wedding-party is already in the porch, being waited on by a deputation from the Campanological Brethren, in the shape of Beaky Jem of the tenor, who grins and rubs his Roman rostrum as he growls out something about the bells. Timson is at him, though, fighting hard to

get a hand into his tight pocket, and fighting just as hard to get it out with what must have been a satisfactory answer ; for St Runwald's peal asserts itself this day far above the roar of the streets, ringing out merrily in thousands of changes, stimulated by the "sight o' beer that there was in that belfry sewerly."

The mirror blank, and then a tall, pale woman listening with clasped hands to a never-wearying tale told her by a strangely-wrinkled little man, who sits and pretends to smoke, and pokes at and arranges the scrubby trifle of hair by his temples with the stem of his pipe—a tale of a little gentle child whose spirit fled as he slept, holding her to his quaint but loving breast. How many times Tim Ruggles has told of little Pine it were hard to say, but neither he nor his listener ever tires ; and perhaps it is due to their hands that flowers bloom so sweetly upon the little grave. The fount of tears might have been dry before now ; but no ! there is always one ready to fall to the child's memory. A strange, quiet woman this, who rarely speaks,

seldom smiles, save when Patty Clayton enters with a dimple-faced baby, and sits and lets the pale, silent woman kneel by her side, and gaze with a yearning love at the tiny piece of humanity, which coos and laughs in her face.

Jared again, and grown older. The man who was puzzled years before by a letter in French from a small Norman town, saying that the writer had been much surprised at not seeing Monsieur Pellet after his note appointing an interview ; but that arrangements could be entered into for the reception of one lady boarder. Jared could not understand this letter, but the truth forced itself upon him at last, that it must have been intended for his brother, who was on his way to keep his appointment when that stern voice cried "Stay !"

Jared is in his old place, with two fresh cherubs perched there, one on either side of the organ—fresh-coloured, bright-eyed, restless cherubs, upon whom the old wooden bloated angels of the instrument look jea-

lously down. And there sits "Grandpa," pretending to practise, but a very slave to the whims and caprices of these household gods. Wonderful now are the variations made upon the pieces played: pedals are pressed down by tiny feet, stops are pulled out or pushed in; then bass or treble discords are played at unexpected times by little pudgy hands; or in the midst of the grand composition of some noble old master, the organ once more gives forth its dying wails, for the wind is out, through Ichabod Gunnis playing at "bo-peep" between the curtains with one of the cherubs, and miscalculating the lasting properties of a well-pumped, full chest of wind. But all this does not trouble Jared, who looks the picture of earthly happiness.

Poor Jared! he is head of the Austin Friars establishment, but he is afraid of the manager there, and slinks guardedly in and out. He goes every other day, because his son-in-law wishes it; but Jared is always very nervous, and fancies that the manager looks down upon him, because he comes up every Sunday from Highgate to play St Runwald's organ, and afterwards eat a modest chop in

Fleet Street with Canau, who generally has been with him to help him with the stops.

The scenes come quickly now across the face of the mirror—scenes of grey old men smoking long pipes, and playing cribbage or whist at Harry's place, or at Jared's home; of life's downward course made smoother for many by the heaped-up wealth that Jared inherits; of old Timson standing before the organist, with hands beneath his coat-tails, and a frown upon his brow, though there is an odd twinkle in his eye as he points to a deficiency in the poor-box, reproached the while by the vicar, who goes with the churchwarden to empty the boxes upon the very next day, to find that deficiency is amply made up.

No glance at mirror now, but a long gaze from a seat at the reality. There is the faint glow from behind the curtain; the softened tones are pealing and quivering in the air as they float round the darkened church. The music is sweet but sad, and the soft strains thrill as they sound funereal—dirge-like. Is it the touch of Jared? The tall golden pipes

stand up ray-like, and they quiver in the glow. The hour is late, the streets are getting hushed, and the solemnity of the place seems oppressive, aided as it is in its influence upon the senses by the wailing strains that sob through the air.

Silence for awhile, and the sense of oppression more heavy; but now once more come the swelling softened tones of the grand old instrument—strains wild and extemporised—music that is almost palpable, as it flows current-like through nave, aisles, and chancel—sad music, solemn strains—and then once more silence.

A strange thrill now, but only for an instant, of jarring pain; for the old clock chimes the hour, and each lapse of time is beaten out upon bell-rim by a ponderous hammer, and the lumbering old machinery is set to work by its weights, and hammers out a mutilated version of the Old Hundredth Psalm, before the clicking, grinding works stand still, and the brazen clangour dies away.

Then comes the organ again, in a sweet strain from some flute-like stop, from where

the faint light rises in a halo, like the herald of the rising of some great orb of sound. And now come, in a powerful crescendo, strains loud and deep, then higher and higher, till the glorious fugue culminates in a mighty burst of harmony, poured forth by the instrument's full power, but only to die away in distant mutterings as of thunder, from the deep-toned pedal pipes ; for the practice is at an end.

That was Jared Pellet's touch—that was the old organist, fettered by no ten-minute edicts of old tea-dealing Timson ; that was Jared, rising on the wings of his music far away from earth ; and now, as the last muttering peal of softened thunder dies away, the faint light is shining upon the bent grey head of my old friend.

THE END.

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